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FIRST THINGS

June/July 1991
Number 14

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

The Christian Intellectual Tradition
Robert L. Wilken

The Unmodern Jew
David Singer

The Advent of Literary Science
John P. Sisk

How Churches Crack Up
Gilbert Meilaender

The WCC at Canberra: Which Spirit?
Lawrence E. Adams

Also: Midge Decter Bids Farewell to the Woman Question
Michael Novak on Liberation Theology • The University in Moral Shambles • Pop Goes the Culture • Islam in Our Midst

Reviews and Opinion: Mark A. Noll on Garry Wills
Peter Shaw • Douglas Groothuis • Dean C. Curry • Kenneth Craycraft

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Richard John Neuhaus

The Public Square

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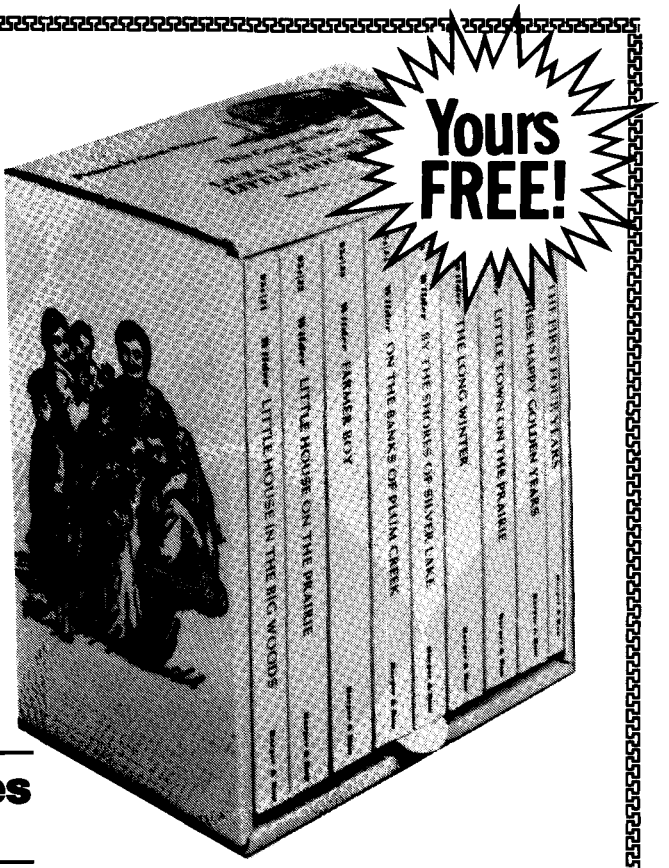
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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

JUNE/JULY 1991 • NUMBER 14

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Defending Kagan

One can, of course, differ with the thesis of Donald Kagan's *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy*, but to suggest (as the April editorial, "How Democracy Came About and How It Might Be Sustained," does) that the work has anything in common with "deconstructionism"—"made up," "fabricated," the product of "myths" and "creative misinterpretations"—is totally unwarranted and patently unjust to Kagan, who is a distinguished historian in the classic, traditional mode.

I would not presume to pass judgment on the substantive issue—whether Pericles' Athens is worthy of the esteem in which Kagan holds it, or of the contempt displayed in the editorial. But it may be of interest to note that Lord Acton, who can hardly be accused (as Kagan is) of advancing a "secular" view of history (still less of being a deconstructionist), has the highest praise for Pericles, and for much the same reasons as Kagan. In "The History of Freedom in Antiquity," Acton describes the age of Pericles as "the grandest movement in the profane annals of mankind, for to it we owe, even after the immeasurable progress accomplished by Christianity, much of our philosophy and far the better part of the political knowledge we possess." When he later pays tribute to Christianity for its unique contribution, "Render unto Caesar . . .," he does so without detracting from the equally unique and valuable contribution of Pericles. (It is also interesting that Acton apparently does not share the editorial writer's view of Pope Gelasius as one of the "critical moments" in the emergence of democratic thought; I have come across no mention of Gelasius in any of Acton's very erudite writings on this subject.)

I should also like to comment on Eugene Fisher's assertion, in another essay in the same issue ("The Vatican and the State of Israel"), that the position of the Vatican in relation to Israel is "virtually the same as that of the U.S. government." Not quite. Whatever its criticisms of Israel, the U.S. government (like Britain, France, and most Western governments) recognizes the state of Israel, whereas the Vatican (like most of the Arab states) does not. That is a not insignificant difference.

Gertrude Himmelfarb
Professor Emeritus
City University of New York

Criticism on Cruzan Case

The Public Square is always interesting and thought-provoking . . . but I strongly disagree with Richard John Neuhaus regarding the Nancy Cruzan case ("The Death Watch," The Public Square, March). Neuhaus, like many who are appalled with the decision to withdraw nutrition and hydration from Nancy, argues more from superficial appearances than from moral principles. Catholic moral tradition has always recognized that there are circumstances which remove the obligation to sustain life at any cost. Pope Pius XII clearly taught that when efforts to sustain life are extraordinary (or become excessively burdensome to the patient or others) there is no moral obligation to employ them or continue them. The Vatican Declaration on Euthanasia (1980) enlarged on the teaching of Pius XII and the Church's moral tradition.

In 1986, the U.S. Bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities considered exceptional circumstances, including providing nourishment, attending the terminally ill and concluded that they "may become too ineffective or burdensome to be obligatory." Neuhaus and others wrongly believe that the Cruzan decision was based on a judgment that Nancy lacked a "quality of life." Because it is ambiguous, to interject "a quality of life" expression in this controversy is misleading. It is not a case of judging that "a life is not worth living"; the question is whether there is a moral responsibility to continue at all cost the artificial feeding of patients who, in the opinion of physicians, are in an

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irreversible coma.

Admittedly, the answer is highly controversial within the Catholic Church. Sixteen bishops of Texas have stated that the withdrawal of feeding for patients in a permanent comatose state is a moral option. The bishops of New Jersey disagree. The bishops of Missouri have taken a cautious middle position and found the decision in the Nancy Cruzan case to be acceptable. Individual bishops can be found on both sides of the issue. The Vatican has refrained from a definitive resolution to the question and is waiting for the national Conference of Catholic Bishops to report its opinion. A special committee composed of the members of the NCCB Pro-Life Activities and the Doctrine Committees is now studying the issue. Hopefully, it will report soon.

Regardless of how the question is finally settled by the Magisterium, I hope that Neuhaus will be less judgmental about those who believe that the Nancy Cruzan decision was moral and in accord with traditional Catholic moral principles. It is hardly worthy of him to imply that this opinion may be no better than the Nazi decision to kill those who in their opinion were unworthy of life.

Finally, did Nancy Cruzan die of starvation? Or was the cause of death ultimately the fatal pathology that required artificial feeding in the first place? I think it was the latter. Food is no more necessary to sustain life than oxygen. When a ventilator is turned off from a critically ill patient for whom there is no hope of recovery, it is not claimed that the patient suffocated or was choked to death. For a parallel reason, it can be said that Nancy Cruzan was not starved to death. In both cases nature was allowed to take its course and death resulted from the underlying pathology.

Neuhaus is as familiar as anyone with the distinction between directly intending to kill and allowing someone to die when there is no obligation to maintain life. It astounded me that he could imply that the Nancy Cruzan decision included the intention to kill. At the least, I hope his gross misjudgment will be seriously reviewed. . . .

Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza
Bishop of Galveston-Houston

Richard John Neuhaus replies:

I appreciate Bishop Fiorenza's thoughtful letter. I would note, however, that I did not say that it is morally necessary to maintain feeding "at all costs." I explicitly referred to instances in which it is not necessary. Further, as I understand it, Nancy Cruzan was neither "terminally ill" nor in "an irreversible coma." My commentary was chiefly on the way that the Cruzan case was publicly discussed, and there is no doubt that that discussion turned on "quality of life" and lives not worth living. I did not say that other opinions on the permissibility of withdrawing Ms. Cruzan's food and fluid are "no better than the Nazi decision to kill," etc. I did say that discussion of lives not worth living is inescapably reminiscent of Nazi views on *lebensunwertes Leben*. The comparison with the ventilator is familiar and suggestive, but I am inclined to agree with those who argue that there is a morally significant difference between the technology of artificial breathing and providing a patient with food and fluid. Finally, the conventional distinction between terminating life and allowing to die is useful and no doubt comforting. However, in the current state of the public discussion, as represented in the Cruzan affair, "allowing to die" frequently has become a fatal euphemism for the unjust taking of life. I would like to think that the above considerations might lead the bishop to review his criticisms and arrive at a "less judgmental" estimate of what I wrote.

Settling the Walker Percy Dispute

Paul Greenberg seems to get a kick out of mocking Joseph Schwartz's interpretation of Walter Percy's novel *The Moviegoer* ("Walker Percy: An Exchange," March), but I think the joke is on him.

Mr. Greenberg attacks Mr. Schwartz for drawing orthodox Catholic messages from Percy's novel and reducing art to catechetics with his tidy, "schematic" reading. Mr. Greenberg's real enemy, however, is Percy himself. In an interview published in *Crisis* magazine in 1990, Percy spoke about the reaction of nonbelieving critics to *The Moviegoer* and commented directly on the passage that Mr. Greenberg uses to support his case:

> *The Moviegoer* was well received, and for the wrong reasons. The Catholic novelist has to be very careful. He has to be underhanded, deceitful, and damn careful how he uses the words of religion, which have fallen into disuse and almost become obscenities. . . . One reviewer said that the reason he or she liked it so much was that at the end of the novel Binx Bolling says something like, "When the word God is mentioned, a curtain comes down in my head; I can't think about it. What I really believe is that a kick in the ass, in the right place, is the only thing a man can do." That was read by nonbelievers to mean a kick in the ass to the Church, you see, instead of to the nonbelievers. That may be my fault.

I think Mr. Greenberg will admit that Percy's interpretation—kicking nonbelievers in the ass—is awfully "edifying." In his other novels, which Mr. Greenberg likes less, Percy made sure that there was no mistake about his message.

I happen to agree with Mr. Greenberg that *The Moviegoer* is Percy's best novel, in large part because it is the least didactic, but it cannot be denied that Percy meant to express the truths of the Catholic catechism in his novels. His numerous remarks about his novels and his essays make that abundantly clear. That is not the only thing he attempts to express, of course. In that same interview, Percy says, "Binx Bolling lived out the various Kierkegaardian modes of existence: aesthetic, ethical, and

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religious"—how "schematic" can one get?

If Mr. Greenberg wants to take a stand against reductionism in Christian art, Flannery O'Conner is considerably safer ground than Walker Percy.

John Wauck
Princeton, NJ

The exchange between Messrs. Schwartz and Greenberg epitomizes the crisis in the study of literature today. Schwartz understands *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy, and is able to do so because he apparently understands the doctrine underlying it, orthodox Christianity. Greenberg is the conventional intellectual of our day, drawn to the obvious art of the book, but unable to comprehend it because he is hostile to its doctrine, and fails to recognize his own. He is a doctrinaire secular existentialist who thinks it is morally *superior* to be confused than certain. He further distinguishes faith and certainty (faith is good, certainty is bad); he needs to consult the *Grammar of Assent* by Newman. There is also a hint of Blake's famous comment on Milton, that he is on the Devil's side without knowing it. If art inspired by uncertainty is better than art inspired by certainty, let us dismiss Dante and the cathedrals.

What is most disturbing, and typical, about Greenberg's piece is the sophomoric sarcasm (masquerading as sophisticated, balanced irony) with which it fairly drips. Either Greenberg is ignorant of intellectual history, or he is disingenuous. The absurd notion that *questioning* is good but finding (or even desiring) *answers* is bad, far from being the bright idea Greenberg pretends it to be, is precisely the false orthodoxy of today in academia. As long ago as 1926, Chesterton punctured this particular balloon (in *The Outline of Sanity*):

> . . . pioneers and empire-builders were filled with hope and courage because, to do them justice, most of them . . . were in search of something, and not merely in search of searching. They subconsciously conceived an end of travel and not endless traveling. . . . The spirit of adventure has failed because it has been left to adventurers. Adventure for adventure's sake became like art for art's sake. . . . Even if we picture the goal of the pilgrimage as a sort of peasant paradise, it will be far more practical than setting out on a pilgrimage which has no goal. . . . For it is a sin against the reason to tell men that to travel hopefully is better than to arrive; and when once they believe it, they travel hopefully no longer.

Or to put it in a nutshell as St. Mark the Ascetic did in the fifth century, "A journey without destination is wasted effort." For Mr. Greenberg to pretend that Mr. Schwartz is the dogmatist, and not himself, would simply be false. We have here two dogmas at loggerheads. The question is, which of them is true?

Jonathan Chaves
George Washington University
Washington, D.C.

Wanted More on Just War

I was disappointed by George Weigel's article attempting to supply moral justification for the actions of the United States in the Persian Gulf War ("The Churches & War in the Gulf," March). I had expected to see some sort of rational analysis based on Catholic just war principles.

Unfortunately, he gave us no such thing. What he did gives us was one long *argumentum ad hominem* attacking all those who might have serious reservations about not only the war's morality but even its prudentiality from a standpoint of American self-interest. I would remind him that those who questioned the war included many thoughtful conservatives, not just the usual leftish clergymen and peaceniks from the 1960s, as he seems to think.

Among those who have decried the Gulf War is our own Holy Father. He has spoken of this "senseless massacre" and of an "adventure without end." On the eve of the January 15 deadline, he pleaded with Hussein and Bush not to begin hostilities. Bush chose to ignore his plea and ordered American forces to start shooting (and bombing). Cardinal Ratzinger, the Pope's right-hand man, has been quoted as being doubtful that this can be construed as a just war. Does anyone think that this extremely astute man would say this unless he knew it reflected the thinking of the Holy Father?

Perhaps more disturbing than anything else is Weigel's good guy/bad guy scenario—his assumption that the United States holds the moral high ground, Iraq being the villain. I would ask him to reflect on the fact that the U.S. is in no position to preach morality to anyone. A country that has [killed] a million and a half of its own people . . . every year for the past seventeen years—almost thirty million people—is hardly a nation able to sit in judgment on others.

I doubt if Hussein's Iraq—whatever its crimes—has sunk this low.

Joseph P. Wall
Philadelphia, PA

On Church & State

Your editorial, "When Church-State Conflicts Aren't" (March) unnecessarily confused matters. Religious individuals or groups are quite free under our Constitution to advocate or oppose policies on religious grounds or nonreligious grounds. A church-state conflict arises when government adopts a policy that has the effect of restricting freedom of conscience or of imposing on all a policy essentially based on the ethos of a particular religious tradition (example: a law outlawing contraception or mandating devotion to Mary in a public school).

Edd Doerr
Americans for Religious Liberty
Silver Spring, MD

The editorial, "When Church-State Conflicts Aren't," in your March issue made me want to cry out in frustration. I don't know yet what article the author was criticizing, but

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the verbiage sounded like disorganized stream-of-consciousness dissatisfactions with arguments the writer did not want to accept.

He points out that 80 percent of Americans "say" that their moral beliefs are derived from religious sources. Does that mean that in an atheistic or 51 percent nonreligious society there will be no morality? Hardly; other sources—the common good, awareness of rights, desire for peaceful existence—all contribute to ethical lawmaking.

Then the writer says that "practical coalitions are almost always premised upon not inquiring too closely into the sundry sources of belief that bring the members of the coalition together." Present-day coalitions in the anti-abortion effort are obviously so ordered—how else could fundamentalist Baptists ever join ranks with Mormons and Roman Catholics? It's evidently easy—just sacrifice principle for a greater power position; don't discuss any great doctrines of God and salvation, just stick to abortion. The end, after all, justifies the means; and a little hypocrisy never hurt anybody.

. . .

Finally, the writer [apparently] operates on the mistaken view that if we can only get at least 51 percent of the voting populace to be swayed sufficiently by our coalesced power structure, emotional appeals, and biblical truth (used only where it will work), then we can pass laws outlawing abortion. If that system were true, blacks would still ride in the back of the bus, women would not have the vote, and we Protestants would have run all the Catholics back to Ireland a long time ago.

Hal H. Eaton
Mouth of Wilson, VA

Misreading Rorty?

Richard Neuhaus concludes his send-up of Richard Rorty (December 1990) as follows. "So now we have followed Mr. Rorty's advice and asked him, 'Why do you talk that way?' Having listened carefully to what he has to say, it is time to follow his advice again: it is time to change the subject." Judging from Neuhaus' account of Rorty's views, this statement is purely self-congratulatory. Neuhaus has not listened carefully to what Rorty has to say. He doesn't have the first clue as to why Rorty talks the way he does.

Neuhaus is astute enough to pick up on one point. He believes in a saving power beyond ourselves. Rorty doesn't. With that disagreement about where we should pin our hopes for salvation in hand, Neuhaus is off and running. Rorty is an individualistic skeptic who doesn't believe in anything beyond himself. He "claims we can say nothing about 'reality,' about what is 'out there'—or at least nothing to which it is appropriate to attach terms such as 'true' or 'false' in intersubjective (public) discourse." Rorty is a self-absorbed Romantic who does not allow for successors who will redescribe him the way he has redescribed his predecessors. His is an egoistic eschatology in which "it seems that our time is the End Time because it is our time."

All of this is, to put it gently, nonsense. Neuhaus systematically inflates Rorty's belief that there is *no saving power* beyond ourselves into the belief that there is *nothing* beyond ourselves. This is an example of interpretative overkill. No doubt Rorty is in sharp disagreement with Neuhaus. But it is a disagreement about where to pin our hopes for salvation. No doubt that is an important matter. But it is not a matter of whether there is an external world.

. . .

The key to all of this is that, despite Neuhaus' repeated claims to the contrary, Rorty is not a skeptic. He is, first of all, a pragmatist. And pragmatists since Charles Sanders Peirce have been at pains to break with the inherent skepticism of modern philosophy. They discount Descartes' notion that beliefs are representations all of which might fail to correspond to reality. Consequently, they dismiss the companion notion that it is our philosophical duty to doubt all of our beliefs in an effort to rule out conclusively the possibility of such a massive failure of connection to reality. The principal tool used in this break with modern epistemology has been a Darwinian account first of the mind and, more recently, of language. In either instance, the pragmatist contention is that since ideas in our minds and words in our language figure in behavioral adaptations on the part of human organisms to the environment, it is no more likely that these ideas and words are totally out of synch with the environment than it is that our physical organs are.

. . .

With our linguistic feet thus firmly planted in the real world from the time our humanoid ancestors first learned to manipulate noises and marks, we latter-day inheritors of that linguistic ability are in a position to talk about, among other things, where we should pin our hopes for salvation. Rorty says that we should learn to be more self-reliant than our predecessors in this instance and depend on our ability to talk differently for change and, if we are fortunate, improvement in our social and personal lives. Neuhaus says that we should continue to follow the example of our Christian predecessors and depend on God for the transformation of our lives.

So far as the connection of language to the world is concerned, each of these beliefs is one among a large number that are held by Rorty and Neuhaus respectively and that are mostly true. Neither of these beliefs is the lone one by which all the rest of their beliefs are connected to the real world. It therefore makes no sense to pick out this one undoubtedly important matter and make disagreement about it into the difference between robust contact with reality and effete self-absorption.

J. Wesley Robbins
Department of Philosophy
Indiana University
South Bend, IN

Don't Forget Scripture

I read with great appreciation Paul Zahl's perspective on ministry and the "credo" that sustains that ministry ("The Things That Remain,"

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February). It was both satisfying and uplifting to hear the reflections of a "kindred spirit," one who knows the joy and pain of being an evangelical in a mainline denominational setting. . . .

I was a little surprised that Father Zahl did not mention, as a part of his bottom-line theology, the authority of Scripture. Nothing, in my opinion, is more crucial to a vital evangelical faith, especially for one who designates himself as "an explicit Protestant." (Is not the authority of Scripture the formative principle of Protestant theology?)

This is not a merely academic matter. Without this principle, most of the affirmations Father Zahl sets forth can and have been "theologized" out of any meaningful existence by various spokespersons for ecclesiastical modernity. This is precisely what must be resisted.

(The Rev.) Russell C. Wentling
First United Methodist Church
Schuylkill Haven, PA

Ethics in a Vacuum?

One cannot help but agree with Stanley Hauerwas ("Honor in the University," February) that ethical behavior comes about through virtuous people, not through the study of ethics in particular circumstances. Codes of ethics in business, law, and politics are necessary for the non-virtuous among us who don't even notice unethical behavior when it occurs.

While a university honor code might be a good idea for Christian colleges, it's just another code of ethics designed to teach right from wrong to the non-virtuous. The real challenge is how to teach virtuous behavior to a generation that does not come from a tradition of Judeo-Christian morality and hence has no sense of revealed truth. If everything is relative, so is ethics. What is the basis of ethical or moral behavior in these souls? This is the real challenge to the teacher of ethics. An honor code is just another set of laws. If we don't break the code, we have honor; or is there more to it than that?

Wilfred Q. Uhl
Northport, NY

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FIRST THINGS
JUNE/JULY 1991

The University in Moral Shambles

The good news is that more people are paying attention to the bad news. In the past year there has been an encouragingly widespread discussion of the role played by Politically Correct (PC) opinion on American campuses. Sundry "speech codes" aimed at limiting free expression and adopted in the name of "racial and gender sensitivity" have come under severe criticism. We are pleased to note that even the ACLU seems to have rediscovered the meaning of authentic liberalism and is pressing the seemingly obvious truth that the free exchange of ideas requires the free exchange of ideas.

Those inclined to be cynical say that liberals are reacting to the tyrannies that they once condescendingly tolerated because now their oxen are being gored. There is a measure of truth in that, no doubt, but it would not be the first time that self-interest complemented what is just and right. The National Association of Scholars was launched by neoconservatives (i.e., authentic liberals), and its ranks are now growing with an influx of academics who have discovered that leftist fun can turn nasty.

There is also reason for hope in the reception accorded two recent books that carefully document the moral shambles of the contemporary university: Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (HarperCollins) and Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (Free Press). Both books provide for many academics what social theorist Alfred Schutz called an "Aha experience." That is, they convincingly articulate what many people suspected was going on but were either reluctant to acknowledge or unable to put into words.

Illiberal Education is a withering critique of the lies and hypocrisies that have corrupted almost every aspect of higher education—from admissions policies to campus life to curricular "reform." It is the more withering because it is so temperate in tone. In part because D'Souza is from India and therefore "a person of color," administrators, faculty, and students convict themselves by being remarkably candid with him about the politics of race and sex on campus. Systematic discrimination against whites and—notably in California—Asians is privately admitted and described in detail, although of course such discrimination is publicly denied. While publicly declaring that their schools do not "lower standards" in order to recruit blacks and Hispanics, presidents and deans privately acknowledge that they have no choice but to lower standards.

The alarm raised by these and other writers is for the sake of liberal education. D'Souza cites John Henry Newman. The purpose of liberal education, said Newman in *The Idea of a University,* is "that true enlargement of mind which is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence." Or, as Matthew Arnold put it, the goal is to introduce students to the best that has been thought and said. The liberal tradition always understood that there would be and must be continuing argument over what is the best. The new thing today is that those in control of many universities deny that there is any such thing as the best. The PC position is that the exchange of ideas is nothing more than a power struggle between interest groups that are defined by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference.

While the alarm is raised for the sake of liberal education, it is raised at least equally for the sake of those who have turned out to be the real victims of what D'Souza calls "The Victim's Revolution on Campus." Blacks and Hispanics in particular are victimized by the cruel hoax of affirmative action, quotas, and other racialist policies. Those of them who make it in the academic mainstream forever live under the shadow of suspicion that they did not make it on merit. Others assume and, more painfully, themselves suspect that they are the beneficiaries of racial discrimination putatively aimed at ending racial discrimination. In other cases, those who manage to get through college do so by avoiding the mainstream and isolating themselves in politically contrived "disciplines" of racial and ethnic studies. Most devastating, however, are the statistics on the very small

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number of blacks and Hispanics who make it through college, or even the first year of college, at all. Never mind, say administrators, quota practices in admissions prove that their schools are not "racially insensitive."

Prestige schools raid black colleges for the relative handful of available black Ph.D.s (degrees mainly earned in education or ethnic studies) in order to fill their faculty quotas. The raising of "race consciousness" has resulted in turning liberal universities in the North into probably the most racially segregated institutions in our society. Interracial housing and social activities are becoming the exception. Race-related instances of violence have become commonplace on these campuses. The solution proposed by pusillanimous presidents and deans is more of the same—"sensitivity training" that consigns individuals to a collective racial identity, thereby reinforcing the self-contempt of blacks and Hispanics who are encouraged to understand their lives in terms not of what they do but of what has been done to them. Radical feminists and homosexual activists, claiming to be the real "niggers" of our oppressive society, jump aboard the victimhood bandwagon, thus further trivializing the genuine injuries of racial injustice in America's past and present.

In the past twenty years, the administrators and faculties of our universities have turned out to be cowards on a monumental scale. That being said, it must also be said that many of them know exactly what they are doing. They are conducting "the long march through the institutions" that began in the 1960s. The radicals who then turned against liberalism as the ideology of capitalist, imperialist, militarist oppression are now often in charge, and they intend to make the most of it. D'Souza suggests, however, that most of the timorous presidents and deans in question do not really have revolution at heart. They are, quite simply, scared to death that they might be accused of violating PC orthodoxy.

The answer is not to go back to the way things were in, say, the 1950s, even if that were possible. It is morally and politically unacceptable that so many American young people are denied the opportunities of higher education. Affirmative actions are required, but they should be *nonracial* affirmative actions. Positive programs can be devised to help young people as individuals, not as members of "entitlement categories" defined by race and sex. Most important, unless the idea of liberal education itself is rescued from the current shambles, going to college will be of little benefit to anyone—black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, or white.

Precisely because we are becoming an increasingly multicultural society, justice and prudence require that students have a common frame of reference for understanding and working through our differences. This means resisting the segregationist politics of race and sex and curricular fads such as "multiculturalism" and "Afrocentrism." Without such resistance, a multicultural society will surely succumb to the racial, ethnic, and sexual warfare of which the contemporary campus is an ominous portent. The good news, as we said at the start, is that more people are paying attention to the bad news.

Opinion

Farewell to the Woman Question

Midge Decter

For many years, I was interested—in both senses of the term—in women's problems. It seemed to me that somewhere in the course of the twentieth century the lives of middle-class American women had been radically altered and we understood neither what had happened nor how to respond properly to it.

The serious Freudians, with their talk of penis envy and father-fixation, certainly seemed far off the point; in any case, the women of my own acquaintance who had undergone classical psychoanalysis were more obtuse about the sources of their own conduct and feelings than any other women I knew. The "parlor" Freudians, those who chalked up every aspect of the human condition to the fulfillment, or lack of same, of all sexual encounters, were merely silly—although to be sure in some cases consequentially so.

Then came the feminists—more properly designated by their original name, the libbers—who were militant, angry, and in the grip of a curious but lethal combination of galloping self-pity and driving ambition. Almost overnight they succeeded in persuading an army of already fretful constituents that everything that troubled their lives was in essence political. Women, said the movement, were an oppressed class, oppressed (in a range of formulations from the so-called "moderate" to the honestly radical) by men, by society, or by the species itself. "The personal is political" was the movement's most formative declaration, to which each of its analyses, demands, and postures, with regard to issues from childbirth to literary scholarship, could by implication be traced.

This was, if anything, even farther from the truth about the special problem of the modern middle-class American woman than the Freudian-type psychologizing, and even less helpful in offering her an

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understanding of it. A quiet look around would have told her and anybody else who actually cared about her that her life had undergone a revolutionary change. For one thing, she was being positively beset by new freedoms. Before marriage, she was now free to pursue an education of her choosing or not, to take a job or pursue a career, to engage in a kind of sample mating, and to marry or not when and as she saw fit. And though there of course remained social pressure on her to marry, if she did not, she was no longer consigned to playing the maiden aunt.

Once married, she was now free to continue her career or give it up, remain married or change her mind about her choice of husband, have a child or not, and at a time and place of her choosing. She could also now look forward to being vigorous and attractive well past what was once middle age, thanks to both birth control and the mechanization of housework—indeed, there was by now an ever higher statistical probability that she would end up a still-healthy widow. She had, in short, become the most transformingly advantaged beneficiary of modern technology, above all, modern medical technology.

That was the good news. The bad news was that no one had ever lived with so many choices before—choices, after all, mean alternatives, and alternatives mean responsibility for outcomes—and there was neither benefit from the experience of the past nor any adequate current thinking to assist in the making of them. The primary appeal of the women's movement, then, lay in the message that everything that troubled her was somebody else's fault. How could any thinking or spiritual discipline designed to help her carry the burden of freedom stand against the siren song of her victimization?

The result of that question is history. There is no need to expand upon what everybody, most of all she herself, knows: a quarter of a century of agitation on her behalf has left her emotionally and intellectually worse off. Especially intellectually. All the demands for unneeded preference in admissions and hiring, all the absurd litigation, all the efforts at speech control and thought control, and most important, all the programs to manage and "improve" the behavior of the men in her life, whether husband, boss, roommate, or date, have left her more disaffected and more mentally self-indulgent than before.

Moreover, just as feminists gained a following by promising that women were non-responsible for their lives and everything in them, so movement spokesmen have extended the principle to cover the content of their own ideological development. Angry with men? say the feminists when it is pointed out to them that relations between the sexes, always delicate, are now almost paralyzed with mutual distrust, we were never angry with men. Hostile to motherhood? Never. Denigrate homemaking? We never for a moment even dreamed of doing that. We have only been saying, give women the option. And so on. It is as if the Marxists, faced with the grinding poverty of Cuba and Nicaragua, were to say, Capitalism? We've never been opposed to capitalism.

The other day I had—or let's say was caught in—a conversation on the subject of career and motherhood. It may have been the thousandth on this particular topic. My interlocutor was a highly regarded and successful intellectual journalist, regular contributor to a most important magazine devoted to refining the minds and tastes of the suburban middle class. She is not in any sense a feminist activist, this woman, only a "right-thinking person." She was suggesting that a working mother with a part-time job should actually be making more money than a full-time worker because her need was the greater.

I suddenly caught a glimpse of myself about to be engaged in this argument, and said to myself: After twenty years of joining arguments on this level, it is simply too demeaning to go on with. This woman demands that the world respect her and yet refuses to be either serious or honest, and has clearly grown accustomed to going extremely easy on herself. Why not? The world has gone easy on her—her editors, her publishers, the courts, the press, and her husband, if she has one. Why should I spend my life being more concerned about what is truly bothering her than she is? True, she and the sisterhood for whom she stands in have had much power to damage the social ethos—and have used it to the hilt. But perhaps any social ethos that rewards perfectly intelligent, well-off, healthy, educated people for being what under normal circumstances would be considered downright stupid, deserves to be damaged.

I will gladly admit that dealing with the kind of freedom now enjoyed by these women can be very frightening. This is an old idea, and a true one. But for how long can one sustain one's sympathy for such a difficulty—in a world where people are required to be unbelievably brave just to have maybe only one choice, where figures like Vladimir Bukovsky and Natan Sharansky escape oppression in solitary confinement by keeping their minds and spirits free? In such a world no serious person ought to be asked to consider such issues as whether using the masculine pronoun for the general case might not be psychically injurious to females—or be induced, indeed, to stoop to arguing the opposite.

This brief article will be my last on the subject—at least unless or until one word of gratitude for an unprecedented share of life's blessings, along with a promise to hold themselves to a standard worthy of respect, issues from the community of America's middle-class women.

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Liberation Theology—What's Left

Michael Novak

Among the far-reaching effects of the great anti-socialist revolutions of 1989 is one that has so far not received a proper measure of attention, and that is their impact on Latin American liberation theology. At least one liberation theologian, observing the collapse of the socialist dream in Eastern Europe, publicly expressed fear that the two estranged parts of "the North," East and West, would now embrace each other heartily and forget the South. (The fear used to be "dependency"; now, apparently, it's independence.)

More generally, the loss of prestige suffered by international socialism after Tiananmen Square, and even more after the "velvet revolution" against socialist oppression in Eastern Europe, brought the "Marxist analysis" on which liberation theology so heavily depended into universal disrepute. The myth of the second world was punctured: the "second world" was in reality a heavily armed version of the third world. Mikhail Gorbachev warned his own people that by the beginning of the twenty-first century the Soviet Union was at risk of becoming a third world nation (at about the level of India). There came in addition the unmasking of the abuses committed under the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the increasing recognition, even on the left, of the realities of Castro's police state in Cuba.

All this has left the liberation theologians with two separate and equally serious analytical problems, one having to do with economics and one having to do with politics. A little history is useful.

For two decades, liberation theologians blamed Latin American misery on "capitalist methods" such as markets, private property, and profits, and they looked for economic salvation by way of a "socialist" strategy of "basic needs." Often they had said of Eastern European socialist nations (as of Cuba) that, unattractive as they were in some respects, "at least they fulfill the basic needs of the people." But in 1989 Eastern Europeans spoke contemptuously of "basic needs" as a strategy fit for prisoners in jail, not for free human beings. And they clamored for capitalist methods as a source of liberation from *socialist* oppression.

It turns out that the preoccupation of liberation theologians with useless socialist methods has left them with little practical to say to the poor of Latin America. Take just one specific problem: massive unemployment. In the year 2000, by all accounts, fewer Latin Americans than today will be employed by transnational corporations (which for some years now have been divesting in Latin America), even as fewer of them are likely to be engaged in agriculture. Where, then, will the scores of millions of Latin America's unemployed and underemployed find work? Their only hope lies in the growth of millions of new small businesses, making the products desperately needed by Latin Americans—the poor especially—and also providing necessary services. In all modern societies, small businesses meeting these needs are the chief job-creating engine.

Given these huge numbers of unemployed persons, no resource is more precious to the future of Latin America than enterprise. No other intellectual and moral virtue can bring together the immense number of idle hands with the immense amounts of work still to be done to improve the living conditions of the poor. It is sad to report that on matters relating to voluntary economic activity—business methods, laws of incorporation, sources of credit, market pricing, enterprise, and the moral virtues required for economic development—liberation theologians have had very little to say. Indeed, most of them remain to this day anti-capitalist by reflex.

It is not only in their prejudices against capitalism that the liberation theologians have been found wanting. One of their staunch defenders in the American academy, Professor Paul E. Sigmund of Princeton University, has recently pointed out (in his *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads,* 1990) that liberation theology faces another basic choice; it must choose between revolution and democracy. When liberation theology first appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s, most of the regimes in Latin America were military dictatorships. "Marxist analysis" had virtually nothing to teach about democratic governance except that its institutions—parties, elections, offices, procedures—constituted merely a "formal" veneer, a "bourgeois illusion." This led at least some liberation theologians to dismiss democracy as a "hoax," while others debunked Western concepts of human rights as a "trap." For such reasons, liberation theologians early appealed to "revolution" rather than to "democracy." They much preferred the anti-liberal traditions of Continental revolutionary thought to the sobriety of Anglo-American writers such as Sidney, Locke, Smith, Burke, Mill, Madison, and Lincoln, about whom, as Sigmund comments, they seemed poorly if at all informed.

Contrary to their expectations, however, the 1980s became the decade of democratic revolutions around the world, and by 1985 at least a dozen new democracies had appeared in Latin America. As 1990 Nobel Prize laureate in literature Octavio Paz has long been insisting, the Latin American soul has been won over by the democratic idea. Although Latin Americans still

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struggle to make democracy work in practice, they concede to no other regime an equal legitimacy. So what will liberation theologians have to contribute to the democratic project?

There is, perhaps, one thing. Liberation theologians committed themselves from the beginning to "listening" to the poor and to organizing them (along with students, lawyers, journalists, and others of the middle class) in *comunidades de base*, or base communities. (It should be noted that the concepts behind base communities in Latin America antedate liberation theology and that the movement is in some ways independent of it.) This important activity provided a necessary ingredient for the development of national democratic life—that process of grassroots self-organization that turns a "mass" or a "mob" into a people. Base communities by themselves are far from constituting a sufficient means for the functioning of representative government. But they do bring into play an important element, heretofore lacking in the civic life of Latin America.

One should not, however, exaggerate the numbers involved in base communities, as many liberationists do in identifying them as "the people." Actually, the members of base communities represent only a tiny minority of Latin Americans. Even by Professor Sigmund's highly optimistic assessment, the number of Latin Americans involved in base communities would amount to about three or four million persons, or between one to two percent of the population of Latin America. Brazil is said to be home to the largest number of such groups—more than 70,000 such communities, according to Phillip Berryman, while Arthur F. McGovern, S.J., estimates 80,000 to 100,000 groups. Since similar estimates have been employed by various writers for at least fifteen years, it is obvious that no one is actually counting; that no one knows how many are involved; and that growth, if it is occurring at all, is not nearly so rapid as the growth of evangelical Christian communities, which seem to be expanding by hundreds of thousands every few years.

It is clear in any case that liberation theologians were caught mostly unprepared for the Latin American democratic revolution of the 1980s. They were not, during that revolution, visible as a major force in organizing the poor for democratic action. One of the liberationists, Hugo Assmann, admitted this shortcoming, calling for a "transition to democracy"—a movement beyond face-to-face democracy to the public and formal democracy of parties and institutions. (Assmann himself is now active in the Workers Party of Brazil.) But one still looks in vain among the writings of liberation theologians to find discussions of the indispensable institutions of democratic (republican) government, such as guarantees of rights of minorities against the tyranny of the majority or divisions of responsibilities and functions that avoid dangerous concentrations of power.

In brief, the collapse of the socialist idea has deeply endangered the project of liberation theology. As an economic idea, socialism is now widely regarded as a mistake based on bad nineteenth-century economics. As a political idea, socialism is now widely regarded as too centralized and monolithic to secure basic human liberties. This leaves liberation theology's social theory in embarrassingly threadbare condition, and as sympathizer Phillip Berryman has conceded concerning the liberationists, "If their social theory is fundamentally wrong, their whole enterprise is in jeopardy."

Defenders of liberation theology hope to rescue the situation by shifting the focus of attention from the movement's social theory to its theology. They insist that liberation theology at its deepest levels is primarily concerned with spirituality. For example, in *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (1989), Father McGovern de-emphasizes the movement's social theories and emphasizes its spiritual reflections. Evidence for this position is presumably found in such recent works by leading liberationist Gustavo Gutierrez as *We Drink From Our Own Wells* and *On Job*. Can it be true that liberation theology is "really" about spirituality?

Although not altogether absent, that was certainly not the major note that liberation theologians struck in the beginning. In those days they insisted on the inseparability of spirituality and revolutionary practice. They emphasized the concrete, material poverty of the poor and asserted that this poverty had to be overcome now, in this world, through dramatic social reconstruction. Indeed, they went so far as to accuse "European" theology of inauthenticity because it was too abstract, too speculative, too removed from the daily life of the poor.

Liberation theology, by contrast, was about "praxis"—the Marxist term for the revolutionary project of removing the oppression of the poor. In *A Theology of Liberation*, for example, Gutierrez penned a biting critique of the theme of "spiritual poverty" found in classical theology: "This approach in the long run leads to comforting and tranquilizing conclusions. This spiritualistic perspective rapidly leads to dead ends."

At its inception, liberation theology was grounded in four key concepts linked together in a single proposition. The four concepts were *praxis, the poor, oppression,* and *socialism,* and the Latin American proposition was that through the practical work of building socialist societies, the poor of the third world would throw off the oppression they suffered at the hands of the first world, especially the United States. And liberation theologians, breaking from the classical theology practiced in Europe, would collaborate actively in this praxis.

Sometimes this collaboration was quite concretely

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focused. Several years ago, when I was asked to speak on the liberation of the poor in Sao Paulo, Brazil, several hundred persons from local base communities entered the lecture hall early and filled up all the seats. To prevent me from speaking, they stomped their feet in cadence and loudly sang the National Anthem of the Sandinistas, while waving placards proclaiming their solidarity with Nicaragua, as if the new society being built in Nicaragua after the overthrow of Somoza was a concrete example of what liberation theologians were hoping to accomplish. For another model of the good society, some Brazilian theologians, such as Frei Betto, pointed to Cuba. Castro for his part clearly recognized the political gain in an alliance between liberation theology and Marxist revolution: "From a strictly political point of view—and I think I know something about politics—I believe that it is possible for Christians to be Marxists as well, and to work with Marxist Communists to transform the world."

It may be that, chagrined over recent developments, liberation theologians have indeed moved from radical social reconstruction to Christian spirituality. If so, that is a development to be warmly welcomed. But in that case, one wonders what if anything remains of the original substance of the movement known as liberation theology.

If the liberationist "analysis" of poverty and oppression in Latin America can no longer be credited, what political hope for the future has been bequeathed to the poor by liberation theology? By all reports, pessimism and near-despair grip liberationists today, who see on the horizon very little indeed that offers hope of a better life to the poor of Latin America. But this darkness results from their own foreshortened vision. They have averted their eyes from—indeed, they have despised—the type of political economy that has elsewhere lifted the poor out of poverty and given them institutions of liberty under which to prepare their children for a better life. The willful blindness of the liberation theologians, their unwillingness to search in the world of social theory beyond the lucubrations of socialism, has had very high costs for the poor during these past twenty years.

The collapse of the Marxist paradigm offers reason to hope that the costs of this misbegotten form of social analysis will not continue to be borne by the poor.

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Immortal Florence

Dante and Michelangelo
You were here;
Brunelleschi, Donatello,
Savonarola, the Medici,
Machiavelli, Ghiberti,
Leonardo da Vinci—
All left their mark;
But none is so vividly present
As the Florentine dogs
As I walk these ancient streets,
Looking steadily down.

Corbin Scott Carnell

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The Christian Intellectual Tradition

Robert L. Wilken

It is easy to get religion, something else to hold on to it. It's like dieting—many find it easy to take off weight, but quite another matter to keep it off. Religion, however, unlike dieting, is not a solitary business. Unless one is an unchastened Jamesian, religion is communal, and for religious men and women, the challenge is not only to keep the faith for ourselves but also to hand it on to the next generation. Only with difficulty and imagination can we transmit our experiences to those after us who feel, think, and act differently than we do. For the task of handing on the faith, the warm heart is insufficient, as the parent who is "born again" or "converted" soon realizes when facing the task of religious instruction.

To be sure, without affections there can be no religious life, as we learn from thinkers as diverse as Augustine of Hippo, Maximum the Confessor, and Jonathan Edwards. Affective language permeates the Bible, as Edwards wrote: "The Holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affections; such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and zeal." With the development of the early Christian community, the vocabulary of the spiritual life expanded so that words such as "love," "desire," and "longing," became as familiar as faith, obedience, and knowledge. The rich imagery of the Bible—e.g., Psalms 42, "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God"—was complemented by the passionate yearnings of the saints—e.g., Augustine, "My love of you, O Lord, is not some vague feeling: it is positive and certain. Your word struck into my heart and from that moment I loved you."

Though there can be no faith without the affections, in a culture steeped in the jargon of psychology the subtle role of the affections in Christian life is too readily supplanted by a shriveled and subjective notion of faith. Indeed, so often is the term faith used to refer solely to the act of believing that in popular speech the object of faith seems irrelevant, as though it is the believing that counts, not what one believes. Faith, in this view, is self-legitimizing, impervious to examination, correction, or argument, and has its home in the private imaginings of the believer or in the sheltered world of religious communities. In the same way, the term "value" is used without reference to the good, as though all values are of equal worth and equal validity.

It is quite possible, however, as our daily experience teaches, to put faith in things that are illusory or false. Faith is only as good as its object; if the object of our faith is trustworthy, then it is reasonable to put our trust in it. If not, then it does not deserve our trust. Credulity is no virtue. A necessary component of faith is reason. The phrase "reasonable faith" was first used in the fourth century by Hilary of Poitiers, sometimes called the Latin Athanasius because of his fine book on the Trinity. In his view, "Faith is akin to reason and accepts its aid." When the mind lays hold of God in faith it knows that it can "rest with assurance, as on some peaceful watch-tower." No leap of faith into the unknown for Hilary. In his view, as in the view of all early Christian thinkers, faith was not a subjective attitude or feeling, but a reasoned conviction. Whether speaking about faith in human beings or belief in God, the church fathers knew that faith cannot be self-authenticating, and that to believe in something false or ignoble is not admirable, but foolish, like trusting a person who is an incorrigible liar.

Even a cursory study of the history of Christian thought will show that the charge of fideism caricatures the Christian intellectual tradition. Yet this caricature has become part of the way we tell the story of Western culture. From Edward Gibbon in the

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eighteenth century through classical scholars in the nineteenth century to historians of the present, Christianity has been charged with substituting authority and uncritical faith for reason, philosophy, and science. "Truth was finally made hopeless," wrote Gilbert Murray, a classical scholar early in this century, "when the world, mistrusting Reason, wary of argument and wonder, flung itself passionately under the spell of a system of authoritative Revelation, which acknowledged no truth outside itself, and stamped free inquiry as sin."

No doubt one of the reasons why faith has been divorced from reason is that by laying stress on the attitude of the believer rather than on the truth of the thing believed, it is easier for people to negotiate our diverse and heterogeneous society. That attitude also discourages religious warfare. If faith is an affair of the believing subject and is self-authenticating, then it is easier for us to tolerate differences and live together in peace and harmony. A genial pluralism offers a protected place for individuals and communities of whatever religious belief to practice their faith without external hindrance.

Yet this form of religious peace has a price, for by acquiescing in a subjective notion of faith, religious people unwittingly empty faith of its cognitive character. When the object of faith becomes secondary to the act of believing, theology becomes reflection on faith, not reasoned speech about God. The theological enterprise may be variously useful or frivolous depending on one's point of view, but it makes no cognitive claims. It is valuable chiefly as an instrument to nurture the identity of a particular community. Hence theology can only speak about meaning "for us" or "for them," i.e., what works in a particular community, and can make no claim to speak about what is true. This is, of course, a reversal of the classical Christian (and Jewish) view that theology's object is God. Once the object of faith is abandoned, theology's object inevitably becomes human experience. Similarly, when talk of the good gives way to the language of values, we inevitably abandon the notion that some values are better than others, and that the *summum bonum* orders all lesser values.

But it is not my purpose here to elaborate on faith and reason, or the question of values, at least not in the narrow sense of those terms. I begin with these observations because I want to discuss tradition.

Religious believers travel in packs, and hence it is assumed that the communal parallel to the subjective idea of faith is tradition. In the marketplace of ideas, particular commitments, i.e., tradition, are thought to be limiting and restrictive because they rest on authority and exalt the wisdom of the past over supposed rational insights of the present. Enlightenment thinkers, writes Alasdair MacIntyre, hoped that "reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places."

So deeply have these ideas penetrated into our consciousness that even religious thinkers have taken them as axiomatic. The mark of rationality, it is assumed, is autonomy. Unless a thinker is freed from the constraints of inherited beliefs and institutions, he or she cannot engage in the spirit of free inquiry that leads to truth. Only if the scholar frees himself from the claims of tradition and becomes independent of external constraints (i.e., tradition) can he properly carry out his work of research, scholarship, and original thinking.

"The traditional Christian theologian," writes David Tracy, "of whatever tradition, preached and practiced a morality of belief in and obedience to the tradition and a fundamental loyalty to the church-community's beliefs. The modern historian and scientist—whether in natural or social sciences—preaches and practices an exactly contrary morality. For him, one cannot investigate a cognitive claim with integrity if one insists simultaneously that the claim is believable because tradition has believed it. . . ." Tracy applies these same principles to the theologian: "The fundamental ethical commitment of the theologian qua theologian remains to that community of scientific inquiry whose province logically includes whatever issue is under investigation." In Tracy's view, the theologian must be committed to the "ethical model of the autonomous inquirer."

Now there is something to what Tracy and others like him say. As early as Origen of Alexandria, Christian thinkers claimed that their ideas should be judged by the "common notions" that are at work within the intellectual community. The openness of Christian thinkers in the last two hundred years to modern thinking is a remarkable sign of confidence in reason as well as in the Christian tradition. They believed, rightly, that truth was one and that if one joined with others in the quest for truth, the results could only be beneficial for Christianity. Christian thought has always been a critical and rational enterprise, and at its best has welcomed the wisdom of the world into the household of faith.

Nevertheless, Christian thinkers have also known that they were bearers of a tradition. "That which I have received, I have handed on to you," wrote St. Paul. This tradition, exhibited first in the Scriptures, was later subjected to critical examination, tested in the lives of countless men and women, defended against its critics, and elaborated in myriad social and cultural settings. Hence, I am a bit baffled why one should assume, as Tracy apparently does, that reason is to be found only outside of tradition and that genuine rationality requires "autonomy." This seems to invite a willed amnesia, a self-imposed affliction

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that would rob our lives of depth and direction. Yet Tracy believes (or did when he wrote *Blessed Rage for Order*) that the liaison with tradition obstructs the path to enlightenment. To be an intellectual, in this view, is to loosen the moorings that bind one to a particular tradition or a living religious community.

That such ideas could take hold in the academy is evidence of how insular intellectuals can be, even religious ones. In many fields of creative work, immersion in tradition is the presupposition for excellence and originality. Think, for example, of music. On Saturday mornings, I often listen to a jazz show on National Public Radio that features interviews with famous and not-so-famous jazz pianists, saxophonists, drummers, trumpeters, etc., and I am regularly struck at how they speak with such respect of teachers and masters, and how to a person they emphasize that they learned to play the piano by first playing in someone else's style or learned to blow the trumpet by imitating Louis Armstrong or someone else. Similarly, one is impressed with how often a performer like folksinger Jean Redpath speaks about tradition as the necessary condition for making and singing folk music. How often we are admonished not to let the old traditions be forgotten. Why? Surely not for historical or archaeological reasons, but because musicians, like painters and writers and sculptors, know in their fingertips or vocal cords or ears that imitation is the way to excellence and originality.

Without tradition, learning is arduous at best, impossible at worst. In most things in life—learning to speak, making cabinets, playing the violin—the only way to learn is by imitation, by letting someone else guide our movements until we learn to do the thing on our own. I am not sure why this is so, but I suspect a chief reason is that only in the act of doing and participating do we truly know and understand. To do something well, we have to give ourselves over to it. Eliot made this point about literary criticism: "You don't really criticize any author to whom you have never surrendered yourself. . . . You have to give yourself up, and then recover yourself, and the third moment is having something to say, before you have wholly forgotten both surrender and recovery."

Reason, it seems, is found within rather than outside of things; it is not an abstract quality that exists independently in the human mind. Which means, of course, that it is *reasonable* to allow one's hands to be guided by a master, and foolish to go it alone, as though one could learn to play the violin or sculpt a statue by studying a set of instructions. In this context, the ideal of the autonomous individual is glaringly inappropriate, for we recognize that here the true mark of rationality is to apprentice oneself to another rather than to strike out on one's own. To paraphrase Kenny Rogers, "Th'll be time enough" for originality when the apprenticeship is done.

What applies to violin-playing or cabinet-making also applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the intellectual life. The way we learn to think is by reading great thinkers and letting their thoughts form our thoughts, as Matthew Arnold reminds us: "Commerce with the ancients appears to me to produce, in those who constantly practice it, a steadying and composing effect upon their judgment, not of literary works only, but of men and events in general. They are like persons who have had a very weighty and impressive experience; they are more truly than others under the empire of facts, and more independent of the language current among those with whom they live."

From the ancients, we learn to use language in a precise way, to understand the inner logic of ideas, to discern the deeper relation between seemingly disparate concepts, to discriminate between things that appear similar, to know what is central and what peripheral. And in the process we are tutored in humility, for we see that the things worthy of reception by us have been tested in the fire of human experience. As Charles M. Wood has pointed out, "Concepts . . . are creatures of history: they come into being, are molded and occasionally transformed through their complex and flexible relationships to other concepts and to the particularities of human existence, and may even fade and wither. The lives of concepts are inextricably related to the lives of actual persons and communities." Hence there can be no genuine Christian intellectual life that is not rooted in history.

In the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*, Wolfhart Pannenberg observes that for a long time he had thought it possible to present theology in such a way that its chief themes could be divorced from the "bewildering multiplicity of historical questions." Only then could the systematic unity of Christian theology become evident. Contrary to his own expectations, however, he found that this way of presenting theology had to be discarded. "Christian teaching is of such a character that it is through and through a historical creation." Its content rests on the historical person of Jesus Christ and on the historical interpretations that arose as a result of his life, death, and resurrection; the language of Christian thought cannot be extracted from its place in history, for without history, it loses particularity, and hence intelligibility.

The first question, then, that a Christian intellectual should ask is not "what should be believed" or "what should one think," but "*whom* should we trust?" Augustine understood this well, and in his early apologetic work, *On True Religion*, he links the appeal to reason with trust in the community and authority. Our notion of authority is so attenuated that it may be useful to look a bit more closely at what Augustine means by authority. For us, authority is linked to offices and institutions, to those who hold jurisdiction, hence to notions of power. We speak of submitting to authority or of obeying authority, and assume that

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authority has to do with the *will*, not with the *understanding*.

Yet there is another sense of authority that traces its source to the *auctor* in *auctoritas*. Sometimes translated "author," *auctor* can designate a magistrate, writer, witness, someone who is worthy of trust, a guarantor who attests to the truth of a statement, one who teaches or advises. Authority in this view has to do with trustworthiness, with the confidence a teacher earns through teaching with truthfulness, if you will. To say we need authority is much the same as saying we need teachers, or to use my earlier term, that we need to become apprentices.

Augustine put it this way in *On True Religion*: "Authority invites trust and prepares human beings for reason. Reason leads to understanding and knowledge. But reason is not entirely absent from authority, for we have got to consider whom we have to believe. . . ." In the Library of Christian Classics translation of this passage, the first words are rendered: "Authority demands belief." Translated in this way, especially the term "demand," the sentence is misleading. For Augustine is not thinking of an authority that "demands" or commands or coerces (terms that require an act of will), but of a truth that engenders confidence because of who it is that tells it to us.

Authority resides in a person who by actions as well as words invites trust and confidence. Augustine's model for authority is the relation of a teacher to a student, a master to a disciple, not a magistrate to a subject. The student's trust is won not simply by words but also by actions, by the kind of person the teacher is—in short, by character. When Gregory Thaumaturgus, a young man from Asia Minor, went to Caesarea in Palestine to study with Origen, the greatest intellectual of his day, he said that he did so because he wanted to have "fellowship" with "that man."

Authority rests neither on external legitimization nor on power but on trustworthiness, or in Augustine's words, on truth. Its purpose is to clarify and illuminate, i.e., to aid understanding, and its instrument is argument, not coercion. If a teacher is constantly saying "believe me" without giving reasons, the student may for a time assent, but he will not understand nor be persuaded, and in time will stop listening. As St. Thomas wrote: "If the teacher determines the question by appeal to authorities only, the student will be convinced that the thing is so, but will have acquired no knowledge or understanding, and he will go away with an empty mind."

Thus far, I have spoken rather generally about the place of tradition in the intellectual life, but since I have made so much of particularity, it is time to be more specific. Apprenticeship is a purely formal category, and, like reason, cannot be discussed in the abstract. Here the point about "whom shall we trust" becomes critical, for just as there are different styles of playing the piano, so there are different ways of thinking. What makes the difference between ways of thinking is not only the subject matter (whether law or biology or mathematics or statecraft or philosophy), but the sources that one draws on.

A particularly acute problem for Christian intellectuals today, especially those who work in philosophy, theology, and related fields, is that they have hired themselves out as apprentices to a body of literature that is drawn almost wholly from the recent past, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For various reasons, we assume that the post-Enlightenment sources formulate the problems that are distinctive to our age, and hence make a unique claim on our attention. Other sources—the Bible, the writings of the church fathers, the treatises of the scholastics—belong to the past and to the domain of historians and biblical scholars.

Further, we assume that the task of the intellectual is to "translate" the substance of the tradition into contemporary language and categories. How, it is asked, are we to speak of God in an age of lightbulbs and computers? The presumed answer is that we need to translate the idiom of the Scriptures into the idiom of our own time, to discuss the biblical faith in terms intelligible in the non-biblical categories of today.

The difficulty with this program of translation is that the language of the Bible is irreplaceable, and more often than not the result of "translation" is that the language of the Scriptures is supplanted by another language, or relegated to the footnotes. It ceases to be the vehicle of thought. As necessary as it is to "translate" the Bible into the thought patterns of our age, it is also the case that Christians in every generation must learn afresh how to think and imagine *in* the language and idiom of the Scriptures.

Let me illustrate the point with the Trinitarian language of Father and Son. My example comes from the dispute between Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth-century bishop, theologian, and spiritual writer, and Eunomius, a second-generation Arian who believed that Christ was "unlike" the father. Eunomius summed up his doctrine as follows: We believe in the "supreme and absolute being, and in another being existing by reason of the First (the Son), and a third being not ranking with either of these but inferior to the one as to its cause, to the other as to its energy." This was a rather startling argument for a Christian bishop, especially in light of the Council of Nicaea's confession (325 A.D.) that the Son was "of the same substance" as the Father.

Gregory in response appeals to the the language of Scripture. Note, he says, that Eunomius "corrects as it were the expressions in the Gospel, and will not use the words . . . by which our Lord conveyed the mystery [of the Holy Trinity] to us; he suppresses the names of 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,' and speaks

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of a 'Supreme and absolute Being,' instead of the Father, of 'another existing through it, but after it' instead of the Son, and of a 'third ranking with neither of these two' instead of the Holy Spirit."

Now one might reply that Gregory, in simply appealing to the authority of Scripture and the words of Jesus, ignores the real issue: How is the language of the Scripture to be understood by people who have been formed in a Hellenistic culture? What point is there in defending the metaphorical language of the Bible in the context of a genuine theological dispute about the relation of the Son to the Father, a dispute, moreover, that has arisen exactly *because* of the imprecision and diversity of the biblical language? But Gregory was as much aware of the difficulty as was Eunomius, and so he proceeded to give reasons why the biblical language has to be respected and cherished and used.

The words one uses, he argues, make a difference; terms cannot be indiscriminately exchanged, as though the content of a proposition remains the same no matter what the vehicle. The term Father, for example, is quite different from "supreme and absolute being," and Son from "one existing after the other," says Gregory, because when the words Father and Son are spoken, we recognize at once "the proper and natural relationship to one another" that the terms imply. These terms signify a relationship that the others do not. By abandoning the terms "Father" and "Son" Eunomius does not simply jettison the biblical language, he also abandons "the idea of relationship which enters the ear with the words." Similarly, his way of designating the Holy Spirit does not make clear that the Holy Spirit is a "distinct entity."

I pick my illustration from Gregory of Nyssa because he is one of the most philosophical of all early Christian thinkers, a man who rigorously subjected the biblical tradition to critical analysis. Yet he also believed that the Scriptures had come from God, and that the language of the Scriptures was not simply the result of historical accident or cultural conditioning. The Scriptures were a firm point of reference, rooted in history, and there could be no genuine talk of God that ignored the biblical language. He approached the Scriptures with humility, looked to them for instruction, and believed that he was subject to them, not they to him.

The difficulty with the idea of "translating" biblical truth into nonbiblical language, as Janet Soskice observes in her fine book, *Metaphor as Religious Language*, is that it assumes that "revelation exists as a body of free-floating truths. . . ." Meaning takes precedence over words, for what is essential, it is claimed, can be had independent of the language, the metaphors, the practices and form of life that have been the bearer of the meaning.

Soskice illustrates her point by reference to the biblical metaphor of water: "Ho, every one who thirsts come to the water" (Isaiah 55:1). She shows how this image runs throughout the Scriptures ("fountain of living waters" [Jeremiah 2:13]; "rivers of living waters" [John 7:37-38]) and Christian tradition (e.g., Teresa of Avila: "I cannot find anything more apt for the explanation of certain spiritual things than this element of water; for, as I am ignorant and my wit gives me no help, and I am so fond of this element, I have looked at it more attentively than at other things.").

The constant repetition of metaphor has gone hand-in-hand with typological interpretation of the Scriptures. To say that God is a "fountain of living water" or a fortress or vine keeper or king, Soskice notes, "requires an account not merely of fountains, rocks, vines, and kings, but of a whole tradition of experiences and of the literary tradition which records and interprets them." The Christian imagination is biblical, and for this reason certain emblematic metaphors, ways of speaking, and events are given priority over others. "The Old Testament's importance is not principally as a set of propositions but as the milieu from which Christian belief arose and indeed still arises, for these books are the source of Christian descriptive language and particularly of metaphors which have embodied a people's understanding of God." Further, the value of the biblical language is not only that it is biblical (that is to say, authoritative), but that it is grounded in the experience of men and women who have known the God about which it speaks.

Language is a vehicle of memory. Few things are more satisfying than to hear old and familiar words spoken or read anew to us. Like the madeleine cake in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, language not only makes alive (or makes present, to use a sacramental term) what gets lost in the recesses of the mind, it also molds our experience, stirs our imagination, keeps before us the same things that it kept before earlier generations, and keeps our mind trained on that to which the language refers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. A pernicious feature of much historical criticism is that it unravels the cord linking the language of the Bible to the living God, and trains us to look away from the ostensible meaning to meanings which, however interesting, are not rooted in history or experience.

The Christian intellectual tradition, then, is inescapably historical. Without memory, our intellectual life is impoverished, barren, ephemeral, subject to the whims of the moment. Memory locates us in the corporate and the particular. There is no memory that is not rooted in communal experience, a strange fact that we all experience whenever we return to the place we grew up and talk to family and friends, yet one that is often forgotten in abstract thought. Just as there can be no human life without the bricks and wood, the trees, hills, and rivers, the neighbors and

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family and friends that make up the world of each of us, so there can be no Christian intellectual life without reference to the writings of the prophets and evangelists, the doctrines of the church fathers, the conceptual niceties of the scholastics, the language of the liturgy, the songs of the poets and hymn writers, the exploits of the martyrs, and the holy tales of the saints.

The Christian intellectual is inescapably bound to those persons and ideas and events that have created the Christian memory, as Dante understood so well. Across the pages of the *Divine Comedy* stride an unparalleled cast of characters, Virgil and Beatrice, the Blessed Virgin, St. Bernard, Potiphar's wife, Cato the Elder, King Solomon and Justinian, Pope Gregory the Great whose views on angels Dionysius the Areopagite corrected, popes Boniface VIII and John XXII, St. John examining Dante on love, and Marco Lombardo discoursing on free will—characters presented not as a series of disconnected lives or philosophical ideas, but as a grand story held together by one thing: how every person and event and idea stood in relation to the "never ending light."

Dante understood that the Christian intellectual tradition is rooted in concreteness. Christian thinking does not begin with general religious ideas or universal principles, but with a particular history that began in a tiny part of the world called Judea and extends across the generations and centuries in a stately procession of those who look to that light which "once seen, alone and always kindles love." For the mystery that lies at the center of Christian faith is mediated by the men and women whose lives have been illumined by that light. The Christian intellectual, then, knows that he does not traffic in ideas alone, for he perceives, with Dante, that God's ways are "buried from the eyes of everyone whose intellect has not matured within the flame of love."

War Games

Summertime on Mama Bell's back stoop,
it always started with someone saying,
"Your mama don't wear no drawers"—
school kids playing the dozens—

and we'd fall over laughing, pretending
to look up some lady's skirt, until
a boy would say, "Well, your mama
wear combat boots to church."

And we'd march around the yard
like soldiers firing into the air.
Trying to out-jank the boys,
I jump up yelling, "Your mama

breath smell like week-old cabbage."
And Mama Bell appears, at first a shadow
on the screen door. "Come on in here,"
she says, pulling me in. "You have
the rest of your life to learn that game."

Natasha Trethewey

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The Unmodern Jew

David Singer

I

"I would like to have an answer. . . . If someone will be good enough to provide the answer I will gladly take his change of garments to the bathhouse for him." The bit about the change of garments and the bathhouse is talmudic phraseology from tractate *Eruvin* (27b), indicating a matter urgently in need of clarification. And that, most certainly, is what Rabbi Louis Jacobs, whom I have quoted, seeks to convey in discussing the implications of modern consciousness for an understanding of the halakhah. As a "non-fundamentalist . . . totally committed to the halakhic way," Jacobs finds himself caught in a terrible bind. He wishes to be modern, yet he is aware that any modern understanding of the halakhah sharply conflicts with "fifteen hundred years of [prior] halakhic activity." This fact, he sadly observes, "cannot easily be swept aside in an approach which purports to follow the normative processes of traditional Judaism."

Jacobs' brooding ruminations on modern consciousness and the halakhah appear in a *Judaism* magazine symposium (Winter 1980) devoted to a discussion of Robert Gordis' essay, "A Dynamic Halakhah: Principles and Procedures of Jewish Law." In this piece, Gordis, a leading Conservative rabbi and advocate of halakhic renewal, seeks to rebut the view that the "halakhah is . . . locked in mortal combat with the contemporary age, the demands of which are, therefore, to be resisted with every means at its disposal." It is simply not true, Gordis insists, that Jewish law was "monolithic and unchanged in the past." Thus, there are "no grounds for decreeing that it must be motionless in the present and immovable in the future." When the "tradition is healthy," he asserts, the halakhah will be "sensitive to the age and respond to it." This, indeed, is the "secret of [Judaism's] capacity to survive."

Gordis rests his case for a dynamic halakhah on the findings of modern critical scholarship, the "past two centuries of brilliant and dedicated research in Jewish law, literature, and life." What this body of scholarship makes clear, he emphasizes, is that "the halakhah has a history that reveals the dialectic of continuity and change at every point." The halakhah comprises two elements—"continuity with the past and growth induced by the present." Gordis states: "Past tradition constitutes the thesis, contemporary life the antithesis, and the resultant of these two factors becomes the new synthesis. The synthesis of one age then becomes the thesis of the next; the newly formulated content of tradition becomes the point of departure for the next stage." The driving force behind this process—i.e., the "factors making for growth in the halakhah"—is, first, the "necessity to respond to new external conditions—social, economic, political, or cultural—that pose a challenge or even a threat to accepted religious and ethical values," and, second, the "need to give recognition to new ethical insights and attitudes and to embody them in the life of the people, even if there [is] no change in objective conditions." These two factors, Gordis concludes, "functioned actively in every period of Jewish history—ancient, medieval, and modern."

In responding to Gordis' essay, Jacobs found himself in the awkward position of endorsing his scholarly arguments, yet rejecting his halakhic conclusions. Gordis' presentation, Jacobs declared, was a "brilliant" exercise in modern scholarship, but one that could have no meaning at all for traditional decisors—interpreters of Jewish law—who viewed the halakhah in "completely static terms." Jacobs observes:

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> Gordis' argument (cogent and entirely acceptable in its main thrust) is based . . . on the findings of modern scholarship. But the picture which emerges from the massive researches of modern scholars is quite different from that painted by the fundamentalists who categorically reject the whole notion of development. But, and there's the rub, the traditional halakhah *is* based on fundamentalism, if not of the Bible certainly of the Talmud.

Jacobs elaborates on this point as follows:

> Modern scholarship has indeed uncovered the dynamics of the halakhah, but, by the same token of scholarly integrity, we are forced to acknowledge that the halakhic process, from the close of the Talmud down to the present day, is, paradoxically, one in which change takes place in a theoretically unchanging system. The reality of change is ever denied by the brave assertion that nothing has changed or can ever be changed. It is true that this is the method adopted in every legal system in order to reconcile the two conflicting ideals of legal flexibility and legal continuity. But with regard to halakhah, resistance to change is not only due to the need for legal stability, but is also based on a most powerful religious dogma, that the Word of God is unchanging and His Law immutable, this Word and this Law being mediated through the Talmudic Sages and through no others.

I have dwelt at length on Jacobs' reflections because they point up in a clear, forthright manner the dilemma faced by those who seek to reconcile modern consciousness and the halakhah. This is an area in which there has been a good deal of wishful thinking, rooted in part in the broader aspiration of modern Jews to maintain some link with Jewish tradition, while not stinting in any way on their modernity. On the halakhic issue at least, the Reform movement has cut the Gordian knot by declaring the traditional procedures of Jewish law to be inoperative. At the other end of the spectrum are the ultra-Orthodox, who comfortably inhabit an intellectual world untouched by the acids of modernity. For those in the middle, however—most especially Conservative spokesmen and the modern Orthodox—the issue is not so simple. They cannot close their eyes to the truths that modern knowledge makes available. At the same time, they seek, as a matter of religious conviction, to maintain the halakhah in a form continuous with the past. Which leads, inevitably, to Jacobs' worried question whether any accommodation between the two is really possible. There is no shortage of those who have a vested interest in convincing themselves that the answer is yes. The available evidence, however—and Jacobs' bathhouse plea is a clear sign here—suggests something quite different.

II

One thinker who is absolutely convinced that the answer is no and is prepared to act on the consequences—to his own satisfaction, at least—is Rabbi J. David Bleich, a key figure on the American Orthodox scene. Bleich is a formidable talent, a man with an astonishing mastery of the full range of traditional halakhic sources, who is also a Ph.D. in philosophy. A prolific writer, he has published more than a half-dozen books, the most important of which are the three-volume collection, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*. Bleich holds not one but two prestigious academic appointments—he is *rosh kollel* (senior professor of Talmud) at Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanon Theological Seminary, and Herbert and Florence Tenzer Professor of Jewish Law and Ethics at Yeshiva's Benjamin Cardozo School of Law—and is a leading Orthodox spokesman on issues of both Jewish and general concern. While Bleich has developed a special competence in the area of medical ethics, his work runs the gamut from the *kashrut* of tuna fish to the permissibility of nuclear war.

Bleich's mode of response to the problem of modern consciousness and the halakhah is a textbook example of what sociologist Peter Berger labels "cognitive retrenchment." As Berger indicates, the religious thinker has basically three options in dealing with the challenges that modernity poses. The first is "cognitive surrender," in which, as Berger puts it, "one simply accepts the fact that the majority is right, then adapts oneself to that point of view." In our context, the position of the Reform movement is an apt illustration of this. The second option is "cognitive bargaining," in which, Berger observes, "there are two conflicting views of the world and they start to negotiate with each other"; an "attempt is made to arrive at a cognitive compromise." Again, in our context, Gordis' halakhic program and Jacobs' halakhic dream speak directly to this. Finally, there is cognitive retrenchment, in which the religious thinker rejects out of hand the basic assumptions of the modernist position. The individual taking this tack in effect states, as Berger vividly expresses it: "The rest of you go climb a tree; we believe this, we know this, and we are going to stick to it. And if this is irrelevant to the rest of you, well, that is just too bad."

Anyone doubting that Bleich is prepared to have the proponents of a modern understanding of the halakhah go climb a tree need only consult his response to Gordis' essay in the same symposium in which Jacobs' reflections appear. Bleich's piece carries the title "Halakhah as an Absolute," and it is indeed absolutely unrelenting in its hostility to the position that Gordis advances. Bleich's opening words tell much of the story: "There is very little in Robert

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Gordis' essay with which I can agree. The Judaism which he describes is not my Judaism; the halakhah to which he subscribes is not my halakhah. Most fundamentally, I suspect that the Deity he recognizes is not the God who revealed Himself at Sinai." Given the absence of a "common frame of reference," Bleich sees no possibility of entering into a dialogue with Gordis. His participation in the symposium is due only to a concern that "silence be not misconstrued" as agreement in any form.

In response to Gordis' key (italicized) claim that "*the halakhah has a history,*" i.e., that it has changed over time, Bleich states categorically (in italics), "*Jewish law does not change.*" "The application of normative, unchanging legal canons to multifarious situations," Bleich asserts, "is not at all a process of change." The changes cited by modern scholars, he maintains, "represent nothing other than the self-same ancient halakhah applied in changed circumstances." Bleich expands on this point as follows:

> All of halakhah is inherent in the original revelation at Mt. Sinai. Some portions of the halakhah were fully formulated; others remain latent, awaiting investigation and analysis. Often it is the need of the hour, a specific query or problem which serves as the impetus to discover what has been inherent in the halakhah from the moment of its inception. The result is not a change or a new construct. It is *a priori* in the sense that it was always present in Torah; it is synthetic only in the sense that it requires a stimulus to prompt the investigation which serves to reveal that which had already been available to the human mind at any time in any age.

Any other view of the matter, Bleich insists, carries with it the implication that the talmudic sages were "frauds and charlatans," since "they taught that halakhah does not change." Bleich concludes: "I must either accept this principle or reject the halakhic process in its entirety."

Bleich's denial of change in the halakhah is matched by a denial of subjectivity on the part of the halakhic decisor. David Novak has aptly characterized Bleich's position on the latter point as "halakhic positivism," in that the halakhah is seen as a "wholly self-contained object, a body of normative content uninfluenced by any subjective considerations." Bleich develops this theme at length in the introduction to *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, an introduction that carries the title "The Methodology of Halakhah." He states unequivocally that

> subjective considerations or volitional inclinations may never be allowed consciously to influence scholarly opinion. Torah study requires, first and foremost, intellectual honesty. . . . It is a travesty of the halakhic process to begin with a preconceived conclusion and then attempt to justify it by means of halakhic dialectic. Neither Hillel nor Shammai nor any of their spiritual heirs engaged in sophistry in order to justify previously held viewpoints. The dialectic of halakhic reasoning has always been conducted in the spirit of "*yikov ha-din et ha-har*—let the law bore through the mountain." The law must be determined on its own merits and let the chips fall where they may.

The halakhic decisor, Bleich declares, is "bound by rules of procedure," by "canons of interpretation, which are themselves an integral part of the Torah." Thus the decisor "may not arbitrarily seize upon an individual opinion or a solitary source to the negation of the weight of halakhic precedent or consensus. He most certainly may not be swayed by the consideration that the resultant decision be popular or expedient or simply by the fact that it appeals to his own personal predilection."

Bleich's negation of change and subjectivity as elements in the halakhic process—the twin pillars of his cognitive retrenchment—comes across loud and clear. What needs to be emphasized, however, is that Bleich puts forward his position as an Orthodox modernist and not as an Orthodox traditionalist. The traditionalist, being happily free of the burden of modern consciousness, is unconcerned with issues of historical change and psychological subjectivism; they simply do not exist for him. Bleich, however, is in a very different category. He is aware—all too aware—of the challenge that these issues pose for a traditional understanding of the halakhah. Bleich's rejection of change and subjectivity, therefore, is fully ideological in character: it is a willed, conscious act, a No in thunder to the premises of the modernist position.

At this point a delicious irony enters the picture. Bleich, having declared change and subjectivity to be nonexistent, is free to put them on display in his halakhic writings. I mean this in two ways. First, change and subjectivity are clearly evident in the halakhic sources that Bleich cites in his various essays. Second, Bleich himself shows a marked propensity for subjectivity and halakhic change in establishing the *psak*, the final halakhic ruling.

This has nothing to do with cynicism or naiveté on Bleich's part. Rather, it reflects his act of cognitive retrenchment, which moves him *beyond* any concern with change and subjectivity. Precisely because Bleich declares these elements to be nonexistent, he can permit them to enter not only through the back door, but through the front door as well. In this sense Bleich is a truly liberated thinker. His job is to focus on the task at hand, whether exploring "Abortion in Halakhic Literature," "The Sanctity of the Liberated Territories," "Teaching Torah to Non-Jews," "Animal

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Experimentation," or "Mental Incompetence and Its Implications in Jewish Law"—sample titles from the three volumes of *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*. It is left to Bleich's readers—and Bleich's readers alone—to take note of change and subjectivity as they manifest themselves in his halakhic writings.

While the process I am describing can be seen to good effect in nearly all of Bleich's major essays, I will limit myself to two examples. The first, underscoring the element of subjectivity, is "The Conversion Crisis," which originally appeared in *Tradition* in Spring 1971 and is reprinted in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (1977). Bleich's thesis is that "conversions of convenience are not sanctioned by halakhah and cannot be countenanced as a panacea designed to minimize the exacerbating problems posed by intermarriage." Bleich treats this position as beyond dispute, framing his argument in the language of absolutes—"uncompromising," "unyielding," "*sina qua non*," "null and void." "As the guardians of a divine mandate," he declares, "Jews must perforce refuse to recognize any conversion not performed in accordance with the norms of halakhah." Bleich states: "Commitment must be total. To be accepted as a member of the community of Israel, the convert must not only subscribe to the beliefs of Judaism, but must willingly agree to observe its precepts. Should the candidate refuse to accept any detail of this code, his conversion is *ipso facto* invalid." Bleich labels as a "meaningless charade" any conversion "prompted by motives other than sincere religious conviction." He concludes with the words, "Only he who comes for no motive other than 'the sake of heaven' may be permitted to become part of the Jewish people."

Bleich cites numerous contemporary halakhic authorities who support the hard-line position on conversion that he espouses. At the same time his exhaustive treatment of the issue—and Bleich's treatment of every issue is exhaustive—brings to the fore some rather eye-opening things:

1. There are "several" instances in the Talmud of converts being "accepted despite self-avowed ulterior motivation."

2. The "definitive" ruling of the Talmud is that "conversions, once performed, are valid even if entered into for reasons other than religious conviction."

3. The Talmud indicates that "ignorance of even the most fundamental observance of Judaism does not invalidate conversion if the candidate, on the basis of his or her limited knowledge, has, in fact, accepted the tenets of Judaism."

4. Some halakhic authorities "grant considerable leeway in determining sincerity of purpose." In this context, Bleich mentions that Rabbi Shlomo Kluger acceded to the wishes of a young man who "threatened to become an apostate if his non-Jewish mistress would not be accepted as a proselyte."

5. Rabbi David Hoffmann put forward the "radical contention" that in situations "where the conversion is to the advantage of individuals other than the convert himself, the candidate may be accepted despite expressed reservations with regard to the observance of a particular commandment." On this basis, Hoffmann permitted the conversion of the gentile wife of a Jewish man who wanted his children to be Jewish.

6. Rabbi Isaac Unterman adopted a "permissive stance" with regard to the conversion of spouses of Russian immigrants to Israel, arguing that if there is "danger that the Jewish members of such families may be lost to Judaism . . . regulations against accepting insincere converts may be suspended."

Bleich, to state the obvious, is fully aware of all this, yet it has no impact at all on his formulation of the halakhic issue. The point here is not that Bleich's hard-line position is in any way inappropriate, but rather that it is the result of a selective—i.e., subjective—weighing of the halakhic sources. (The same point, of course, applies to the views contained *within* the sources themselves.) Bleich, despite his brave talk about pure objectivity, is not an IBM computer spitting out information. He is a flesh and blood human, who chooses and weighs among various alternatives. There is no need here to speculate why Bleich opts for the hard-line position on conversion. It is sufficient to note that Bleich's personal predilections play no small role in determining where the halakhic chips fall in this case.

A second example, underscoring the element of change, is "Status of the Deaf-Mute in Jewish Law," an essay originally published in *Tradition* in Fall 1977 and found now in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems, Volume II* (1983). In this instance, Bleich adopts an extremely lenient position, setting aside the weight of prior halakhic opinion. Bleich is clearly disturbed by the serious disabilities that the deaf-mute suffers in Jewish law and sets out to do something about it. That something involves nothing less than a wholesale transformation of the halakhic status of the deaf-mute.

In the talmudic sources, the deaf-mute is considered to be mentally incompetent and thus in the category of persons who, as Bleich puts it, "cannot be held responsible for their actions and who lack the requisite intelligence for the performance of various ritual and civil acts." Among other things, the deaf-mute cannot serve as a witness, enter into a contract, or be counted toward a *minyan*. Greatly complicating matters here is the fact, as Bleich observes, that "in rabbinic literature restrictions applying to deaf-mutes are stated categorically without provision for exception." The halakhah makes "no distinction between various deaf-mutes"; indeed, "most later authorities . . . reject any distinction between a congenital deaf-mute and one who becomes a deaf-mute as a result of injury or illness."

How does Bleich respond to all this? Basically, by

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dismissing it as so much ancient history. The "restrictive statements regarding deaf-mutes," he argues, "must be understood in terms of the context in which they apply." The traditional halakhic sources assume that the deaf-mute is "uneducable," whereas at present "this is manifestly not so." Bleich, bucking the trend of halakhic opinion, does not hesitate to declare that the "halakhic categorization of deaf-mutes as mentally deficient is ad hoc in nature and hence does not apply to deaf-mutes who have overcome their handicap and manifest normal intelligence." On this ground he reaches the general conclusion that

> those who possess even minimal hearing or have acquired intelligible speech are certainly not subject to any of the halakhic restrictions which apply to deaf-mutes. . . . Moreover in the light of the degree of education attained even by true deaf-mutes in contemporary society, it is doubtful that they are to be considered examples of the *heresh* described in rabbinic references. Hence, they should be encouraged, and indeed required, to participate fully in Jewish religious life, including performance of all ritual obligations as well as in Torah study.

This from the man who tells us—in italics no less—that Jewish law does not change.

III

By now the reader's patience may well be wearing thin. What, after all, is the point of these reflections? And what kind of a model is J. David Bleich? Are we to take seriously a thinker who denies something as obvious as change and subjectivity in the halakhah, and who, moreover, then proceeds to parade them in his own halakhic writings? Does Bleich's act of cognitive retrenchment speak to anything beyond personal idiosyncrasy? Does it illuminate any larger truth about the relationship between traditional and modern understandings of the halakhah?

The answer to all of these questions, I firmly believe, is yes. Bleich's stance demands attention and respect because it constitutes a bold countermove to modern consciousness' challenge to the halakhah. Unlike other prominent figures—Joel Roth and David Novak in the Conservative movement and David Hartman and Irving Greenberg in the Orthodox camp—Bleich holds out no hope of reconciling traditional and modern approaches to Jewish law. His operative assumption—a realistic assumption, indeed—is that the two are incompatible and that it is necessary to choose between them. When Bleich states, "I must either accept the principle [that halakhah does not change] or reject the halakhic process in its entirety," he does not exaggerate in the least. By choosing as he does—negating change and subjectivity—Bleich can continue to function within a traditional halakhic framework. The fact that this framework allows ample room for the very elements which he denies—as his own writings testify—is simply an added bonus.

Bleich's act of cognitive retrenchment does more than cut through an intellectual dilemma: it also liberates him psychologically. While the proponents of cognitive bargaining, let alone cognitive surrender, are held in thrall by modern consciousness, Bleich goes about his intellectual labors unencumbered by this. As a thinker, he is fully in control, pursuing an intellectual agenda wholly his own—Bleich, not modern consciousness, is in the driver's seat. The proof of this is the complete absence of an apologetic strain in Bleich's halakhic writings. Bleich pays no heed at all to the advocates of a modern conception of the halakhah; their point of view never once surfaces in his essays. It is just this element—Bleich's stance *beyond* modern consciousness—that enables him to exhibit change and subjectivity in his own writings without showing the slightest hint of self-consciousness. For Bleich this has taken on the character of a non-issue: change and subjectivity in the halakhah just cannot be.

But what about those Jews of a traditionalist bent for whom change and subjectivity remain an issue, indeed a patent fact? They, to mangle the talmudic phrase that I cited at the beginning of this essay, have their backs up against the bathhouse wall. They can opt for cognitive surrender, but then they must give up on the halakhah in its traditional mode. They can opt for cognitive bargaining, but then they must go on bargaining forever, with no hope of a breakthrough. The only reasonable—rational—alternative is cognitive retrenchment à la J. David Bleich. Short of that, they will have to adopt a variant of the "tradition of esotericism" identified by Leo Strauss, speaking the truth "not plainly but secretly." In any case, it needs to be understood that nothing short of a willed rejection of what modern consciousness makes known about Jewish law can save the traditional halakhic process. Call it compartmentalization, myth-making, false consciousness, bad faith, or whatever, it is the only way to sustain the halakhah in the context of modernity.

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The Advent of Literary Science

John P. Sisk

It is now more than thirty years since C. P. Snow's Cambridge Rede Lecture, "The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution," popularized the notion of a dangerous rift between the literary and scientific worldviews. Snow put the blame on the pessimistic, anti-social, and politically silly literary intellectual, and opposed to him the optimistic and socially concerned scientist who had the future in his bones. In Snow's view, the culture of literature, the traditional culture, had been "remarkably little diminished by the emergence of the scientific one, which rules the Western world." F. R. Leavis' Richmond Lecture at Cambridge a couple of years later was the best publicized and probably the angriest rebuttal of Snow's position. Plainly, Leavis took a dim view of whatever future the scientific culture had in its bones. For better or worse, the controversy was upstaged when another rift began to develop, now between the traditional culture and the counterculture, which never had any doubt about whose bones the future resided in, and in fact was inclined to believe that literary and scientific intellectuals had long before entered into an unholy alliance to repress the questing human spirit.

In the meantime, the world has gone on in its usual rift-creating fashion, casting aside future-impregnated bones as indiscriminately as a grave robber. But just as it is possible for some to believe that counterculturists are not quite on the verge of becoming an endangered species, so it is still possible for others to believe that C. P. Snow was mainly right. Indeed, the disarray of literature and the arts in the postmodern world favors the conviction that if there is hope anywhere it is with the culture of science. Nevertheless, recent developments in the scientific culture, especially as we see them reported in books like James Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science*, suggest that Snow's greatest mistake was his failure to take into account the extent to which the literature of science is literature itself, which has all along anticipated much of what science ultimately spells out in its own terms—terms that have often enough seemed invidious to literature. The rift between the two cultures has tended to obscure this relationship; certainly it obscured it for Snow and Leavis as well.

Thirty-four years before Snow's lecture, Alfred North Whitehead in *Science and the Modern World* (1925) had made it clear that the relationship was not obscure to him. He knew that "until recently nearly all writers have been soaked in classical and renaissance literature," with the result that they have tended to ignore philosophy and science. Nevertheless, he recognized that "it is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression." With this conviction in mind, and thinking in particular of Wordsworth and Shelley, he is moved to ask: "Is it not possible that the standardized concepts of science are only valid within narrow limitations, perhaps too narrow for science itself?"

Gleick, I think, would have answered in the affirmative. "There has always been a feeling, not always expressed openly," he says, "that theoretical physics has strayed far from human intuition about the world." So he tells us that the French physicist Albert Libchaber's intuition that "the recursive power of flows within flows" needed not only the mystical inspiration of Goethe but the language of the poet Wallace Stevens rather than the standard differential calculus. And he needed no less, Gleick might have added, what three centuries ago Giambattista Vico was calling *fantasia*, that faculty of imaginative understanding so conspicuously lacking in the Enlightenment absolutists who, as Isaiah Berlin has pointed out, did so much to create the rift between the sciences and the humanities. Vico's *fantasia* abhors partial vision, and the great mathematician and astronomer Henri Poincaré is on his side when he observes in his *Last Essays* that in questions

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of ethics science alone cannot suffice because it "can see only one part of man, or, if you prefer, it sees everything but it sees everything from the same angle."

Gleick is concerned with the paradox that within this relatively new chaos, so upsetting to the order that physicists, astronomers, and biologists had learned to expect, the computer makes it possible to discover a new kind of order. This is the reversal of expectation that in literature we know as peripety, that unsettling surprise that, however it may threaten the perceived universe of a particular character, ultimately serves the achieved order of the work, which may be said to thrive on the disorder that opposes a simplistic solution to problems of plot, character, and theme. The experience of great literature, grounded as it is on the concrete nature of reality, is the repeated experience of this paradox so that the peripeties of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare's *King Lear* are prefaces to the unsettling peripeties of Einstein, Heisenberg, and Bohr.

With paradox we are in the ample territory of irony, and literature is the prescientific school of ironic perception. After Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Stevens we are well prepared for the "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" that in chaos theory is given the poetic name of the Butterfly Effect: "the notion that a butterfly stirring the air today in Peking can transform storm systems next month in New York." Gleick sees this magnifying effect of small changes in folklore, but a literary person, and certainly humanistic scientists like Whitehead and Nobel laureate Erwin Schrödinger, are more likely to be struck with the butterfly effect of Desdemona's handkerchief in *Othello,* Achilles' wrath in Homer's *Iliad,* and Eve's eating of the apple in Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("all nature felt the shock"), or of Marcel's tasting of the madeleine dipped in herb tea in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past.* And where more than in *Hamlet,* set in a particular place and time with a limited cast of characters interrelated in quite specific ways, do we experience the mysterious and ironic disproportion between mere spatial dimension and the immensely more extensive structural and thematic dimension that characterizes the fractal that figures so prominently in chaos theory?

Even those contemporary scientists who remain skeptical empiricists in the face of what they rightly sense to be the metaphysical threats of the fractal and the butterfly's wing have literary antecedents—the skeptical and nature-loving Roman philosopher-poet Lucretius, for instance. The latter's *De Rerum Natura,* with its reduction of reality to blindly tumbling atoms, prepares for the necessitarianism of the eighteenth-century mathematician Laplace and his epigones (among them, of course, antimetaphysical literary naturalists like Zola, the Goncourts, Theodore Dreiser, and Samuel Beckett). Perhaps an even more memorable anticipation of Laplace and his kind is in Shakespeare's *Othello,* in which the cynical materialist Iago is just as certain as Laplace is in his *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities* that "all the effects of nature can be reduced to a small number of immutable laws"—laws which, as Shakespeare in anticipation of Whitehead makes dramatically clear, are valid only within very narrow limitations.

Literary people too, especially when they are pressed too hard by those narrow limitations, are capable of their own protective reductions. In this case, we get something like e. e. cummings' famous couplet "I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing/Than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance"—or even, more memorably, Keats' complaint in "Lamia" that "cold philosophy" (Newton's optics) threatens to reduce the rainbow to "the dull catalogue of common things."

But Keats is a more complex person and "Lamia" a more complex poem than this reference to Newton might suggest. The poem can be read as the story of young Lycius' loss of an erotic utopia with an entrancing transmogrified serpent because of the jealous hostility of Lycius' mentor Appolonius, whose unanticipated appearance at the wedding "in philosophic gown" and "with eye severe" results in the vanishing of Lamia and the death of Lycius. But if you approach the poem through Keats' letters, especially the letter of December 21-27, 1817, to his brothers George and Tom with its famous definition of "negative capability" ("when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"), you may see that the Lamian and Apollonian forces in the poem are not contradictory but complementary, and it is Lycius' tragic fate not to be able to see this.

Keats, like the greatest literary artists, possesses what Norman Rabkin in his splendid *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* calls the vision of complementarity. The immediate reference of the term is to the modern physicist's conviction that light, previously understood as waves, must now also be thought of as quanta, discrete packets of energy, and that these apparently contradictory theories are really complementary. One must be able to keep both in mind "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"—without, that is, insisting on a reduction in the interest of unity and simplicity. Here, as Rabkin summarizes the physicist Niels Bohr, twentieth-century physicists "forced to live with apparently irresolvable paradoxes and contrarieties are, distressing though it may seem at first, in the mainstream of human experience." And Bohr is as aware as Whitehead that literature and art are the prime articulators of this mainstream. In "Unity of Knowledge" he observes that "the enrichment which art can give us originates in its power to remind us of harmonies beyond the grasp of systematic knowledge." So he is looking ahead to chaos theory just as Keats is looking ahead to him and Poincaré, and at the same time Bohr is placing on the scientist the same burden of irony

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that Keats places on all irritable reachers who demand a systematic clarity that will end the matter. And the irony is further burdened by the recognition not only that irritable reaching sometimes pays off but that sometimes serendipity proves to be more important than talent.

Gleick emphasizes the extent to which the comfortably predictable world of the pre-chaos scientist has been upset by the "demon of nonlinearity." Nonlinear terms "tend to be the features that people want to leave out when they try to get a good simple understanding." These are the terms that, for better or worse, define caricature, daydreams, melodrama, Manichaean linear thinking, as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Joyce's *Ulysses* do. They cannot be aesthetically successful without demonstrating the possibility of achieving an order that will stand fast against all threats of peripety, so that in literature at its toughest best the demon of nonlinearity ends up on the side of the angels long before he troubles the world of nuclear physics. And when literature comes up short of its toughest best the demon can have the effect of endorsing some very strange angels: Consciousness III Man of Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, the acidhead visionaries of Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, or the Shirley MacLaine of her *Dancing in the Light*. Hence one of literature's cultural obligations is to encourage an ongoing effort to distinguish between valid and bogus nonlinear epistemologies. Thus in astronomy's long effort to disentangle itself from astrology its grand heuristic model is Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, in which the poetic sublimities of a drunken Caliban are defined against the truly expanded consciousness of Prospero.

In any event, one of the unavoidable side effects of literature and the arts generally is that they cater to the human need to believe that cognitive dissonance is only a temporary thing, so that they anticipate and support those grand unification theories that have compelled political reformers no less than scientists. The atomic scientist Robert Oppenheimer in his 1953 BBC Reith Lectures considers the expectation of a universal knowledge "to be an illusion fostered by the monistic view of the world in which a few great central truths determine in all its wonderful and amazing proliferation everything else that is true."

Nevertheless, the expectation never ceases to fire the minds of men. A grand unification theory is the announced goal of that remarkable man, Stephen Hawking, who aspires to "a complete understanding of the universe, what it is and why it exists at all." As an Oxford- and Cambridge-educated man, Hawking must know that he is competing against the epochal grand unification theories in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The latter become part of the literature of science both by modeling the possibility of a thoroughly satisfactory aesthetic unity and by inciting the anxiety of influence that will later be a factor when Dante's and Milton's omniscient and omnipotent Creator is transmuted into Laplace's formulas of probability.

Perhaps Hawking's theoretically clarified universe would be one "that sensitive and timid natures could regard without a shudder." So ends that literary masterpiece *The Education of Henry Adams*. The book is a brilliant presentation of the cognitive dissonance that results from a faulty education, especially for a historian who continues to be hounded by the models of harmony he found at Chartres Cathedral and in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. "Always and everywhere," he writes, "the Complex had been true and the Contradiction had been certain." When in 1904 Arthur Balfour announced "that the human race without exception had lived and died in a world of illusion until the last year of the century," the peripety for Adams was on the order of Oedipus' discovery that he was married to his mother. He was a pre-complementarity irritable reacher who might have benefited from chaos theory, learning from it that the Dynamo did not necessarily cancel out the Virgin as a reputable source of truth and energy.

But in the meantime his old-fashioned and insufficiently ironic humanistic education had left him with aesthetic expectations of unity that would not stand up against the scientific flowering of the Enlightenment. Chaos for him had its old-fashioned meaning: "In plain words, Chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man." Perhaps his problem was not that he had spent too much time with literature and too little with mathematics but that he had not had the advantage of teachers like Lionel Trilling, Norman Rabkin, and Frank Kermode, who might have helped him turn Balfour's peripety back on himself.

One of those destroyers of unity for Adams was the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel, an ardent and influential Darwinian, was a materialist and determinist. Put his *The Riddle of the Universe* alongside Adams' masterwork and you can see how neatly Haeckel solves Adams' problem about unity by getting rid of free will, religion, and the immortality of the soul (that it is immortal "is the highest point of superstition") and by his theory of spontaneous generation (his zoological Big Bang that needs no Banger). Haeckel's universe is as unified as Adams' is disunified, and Haeckel is as confident about his place in his universe (and his location in a process that will ultimately solve all riddles) as Adams is wracked with doubts. But Haeckel, like the earlier French rationalist Bernard Fontenelle, began with the humanities. Like the determinist Marx, he loved Goethe; he studied painting in Italy and saw art as a possible career, which may have had something to do with the fact that for congenial souls his universe has the same aesthetic appeal that Lucretius' does: it spells out their dearest expectations that the universe when truly known will have the clarity of a great poem.

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But this is the way it is for all materialistic determinists who apprehend the universe as an enclave of order, the perfect work of art liberated from any vulgar reliance on an identifiable and worshipable artist. Lucretius even manages to smuggle free will into it: the chance consequence of the rubbing together of tumbling atoms. Only a man steeped in literature could have come up with such a fabulous theory. Laplace, having put literature behind him and staked all on the laws of probability, may have been as blindingly in thrall to his mathematics as Macbeth was to the predictions of his witches, but there is no reason to doubt the aesthetic perfection of his vision of reality. For Haeckel and Laplace, as for Adams in his bleaker moods, there is no aesthetic alternative to total determinism. All three of them might have benefited from Poincaré, who held that while science introduces determinism wherever it penetrates, still "the domain of conscience remains inviolate." But Poincaré as Adams read him was just one more obstacle to the grand unification he yearned for.

All grand unification theories are modeled by the metaphor, literature's prime means of clarification and the epistemological foundation of Whitehead's "concrete outlook of humanity." It is in metaphor that the apparently irreconcilable terms are reconciled, revealed in a peripety to be complementary in a meaningful new context that does not deny the validity of the prior context in which the constituent terms were located. When Macbeth in the well-known speech is forced to confront the shattering reversal of all his expectations, he sees life as a "brief candle," a "walking shadow," an actor "that struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more" and as "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing." The metaphors not only reinforce one another in a powerful clarification of Macbeth's experience of peripety but each metaphor is the expression of a creative act that counters his nihilism. His very language implies a perspective beyond his own, which is the perspective of the play. The aesthetically unified tragic experience is possible only if the reader or audience can hold both perspectives in mind: giving priority to the play's without refusing to concede to Macbeth's its own reality and logic. In his own way, then, Shakespeare is preparing his readers to expect and accept without too much irritable reaching the complexities and contradictions, including contradictory theories about light, that are at once the causes of cognitive dissonance and the conditions of human knowing.

In metaphor, we see the same unpredictable and paradoxical excess that Gleick sees in the butterfly's wing and the fractal. The metaphor is the primordial closer of rifts; its dramatic promise is that unexpected and significant connections will continue to be possible, and its implied threat is that when we can no longer believe in that promise we will have to use another metaphor to express our loss of faith: something like Macbeth's "tale told by an idiot." The metaphor is the established and prescientific epistemological structure that cultivates the mind's capacity to accept those peripeties of science in which the unexpected microscopic perspective is shown to be complementary to the more familiar macroscopic perspective which it appears to contradict—so that they are in analogy with the double vision imposed on the reader of *Don Quixote* and *Hamlet*.

But as we have learned, wherever there is metaphor the demon of nonlinearity can go to work, arousing the usual fears about unpredictability and loss of rational control, as we see in people like Francis Bacon, John Locke, the French critic-novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, and the late Paul de Man. For such people metaphor not only promises more than it can deliver but its promises are too often grounded on false consciousness, so that a loss of faith in it is the beginning of wisdom—perhaps the philosopher Richard Rorty's discovery (bad news for Haeckel and his kind) that out there there is really no "out there."

Of course, metaphoric perception has all the vulnerability to skeptical attack that any leap of faith has. Like so much writing that gathers under the ample umbrella of literature, it has a notorious capacity to undercut itself with low- and middle-brow banalities, hasty generalizations, *ad nauseam* repetitions, and marketplace hyperboles. But to lose faith in it for this specious reason (as if a high incidence of adultery casts doubt on the validity of marriage) is to lose faith not only in literature but in the mind's capacity to make those nonlinear leaps beyond present certainties that give Einstein an occupation and Hawking precedent for his dream of grand unification. Without this faith, as distinguished scientist-humanists like J. Bronowski and Michael Polanyi have pointed out, science is nowhere and Macbeth's despairing statement is hard to improve on. Producers of literature, when they are not themselves wracked with doubts or preoccupied with taking a postmodern revenge on traditional expectations of order, speak out of a prescientific discipline of expectation—a school of faith that models the need to bracket with ironic reservation that information which, if not bracketed, would insist simplistically that life is only a bracket-defying tale told by an idiot.

Shakespeare, despite the efforts of the neohistoricists and exuberant revisionists like the Gary Taylor of *Reinventing Shakespeare*, is a powerful proponent of this discipline. At the end of *The Winter's Tale*, when the amazed and once faithless Leontes is still not certain whether his long-lost Hermione is really standing alive before him or is only a magician's illusion, the "magician" Paulina tells him: "It is required/You do awake your faith." Her formula—no faith, no love, no life—implies that she, like the playwright, knows all about sensitive dependence on initial conditions. Einstein is on her side when he

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says, "I shall never believe that God plays dice with the world." For Haeckel, of course, Paulina is asking him to believe in a miracle, and in his heart of hearts he knows that the brilliant progress of modern science "has excluded from the story of the earth all question of miracles."

As Shakespeare and his kind never tire of telling us, the most dangerous rift of all is that between the culture of faith and the culture of faithlessness. Haeckel with his scorn of "the mystic faith based on revelation" and his bold embrace of pure monism would appear to belong with the culture of faithlessness. Fortunately for his peace of mind, he did not live long enough to read Erwin Schrödinger's *Mind and Matter* (the 1956 Tarner Lectures at Cambridge), which gives little comfort to confirmed monists, to say nothing of Schrödinger's later *My View of the World*, which even has good things to say about Buddhist wisdom. Nevertheless, Haeckel, in whose vision of the universe the possibility of free will is aesthetically offensive, finds in Goethe "a perfect poetic expression" of his own philosophy. But this is the Goethe who makes the admiring assertion in "Shakespeare ad Infinitum" that Shakespeare's distinction lies in the fact that "in his plays Will and Necessity struggle to maintain an equilibrium." We may fault Goethe now for having shared Keats' objection to Newton's theories about light, but his own faith, as *Faust* makes clear, was the prescientific faith of a literary man who never doubted that his sense of reality would stand up against skeptical empiricists. Being no more an optimistic monist than St. Augustine or Michael Polanyi, he was not, like Haeckel, protected from seeing the extent to which in science things are proven because of a synergistic faith in science.

Haeckel, having been born again through his encounter with Darwin, suggests the epistemology of those stalwart members of the culture of faith, the romantic poets, who thought of themselves as sensitive reeds through whom the metaphysical truth of things pulsed like irresistible grace. His book, which is a celebration of "our new monistic religion," makes it clear that he is in his own way as religious as his French contemporary Comte, who before he became insane never doubted that his positivistic "new religion of humanity" was a surefire program for a grand unification of the world. Such sensitive reeds, lacking Shakespeare's and Paulina's irony, easily enroll one another in a gnostic elite whose entrancing anti-metaphysics protects them from those dangerous harmonies that are in the domain of the demon of nonlinearity.

Literature, insofar as it has been concerned with establishing time- and entropy-resisting truths that go beyond its own idolization, has always been congenial to religion—so much so that for people like Comte and Haeckel, literature carries a religious virus that threatens the health of their projects. Hence the necessary strategy of a counterreligion with its promise of a triumph over time—a triumph that even promises the end of theory and the end of Nobel prizes as well. But this is time much more simplistically and linearly conceived than it is in *The Winter's Tale*. There chronological time, which as Frank Kermode says in *The Sense of an Ending* is only "waiting time," must be apprehended ironically in relation to a time of fulfillment, of "intemporal significance." This time is realizable only if we can discipline our clock-bound irritable reaching. Thus literature, so long as it does not lose faith in itself or take itself to be the beginning and end of faith, in the process of being a school of faith and a school of metaphor is a school of time in which a nonlinear Shakespeare looks forward to Einstein and Poincaré. Books, Kermode observes, "are indeed world models," but they are also science models, and so in the best of them we find not pre-fascist prescriptions for a unity beyond entropy but demonstrations of the order that can be achieved in a creative confrontation with it. So in *The Winter's Tale* and in Edmund Spenser's "Two Cantos of Mutabilitie," no less than in Henry James' *The Ambassadors*, Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the second law of thermodynamics is accepted as the given condition of human discovering and making.

Now of course the reductive and grand unifying impulse of Laplace, Comte, and Haeckel is at work in the world of post-structural criticism, which has had to get rid of the author for the same reason that those three had to get rid of God. Admit the author and you risk the beat of a butterfly's wing that disturbs the air all the way back to the metaphysical. So the late Paul de Man saw the metaphor as a prime cause of delusion and preferred allegory to metaphor as the safer and more rational way to correct the false heuristics of the latter. Deconstruction, Christopher Norris writes in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, "suspends the persuasive (or meaningful) force of language in the interests of a purified logic of figures."

In this purified Logic (Henry Adams would have seen it as another sign of the triumph of the Dynamo over the Virgin), one sees that fear of loss of rational control over the sensible universe that led the seventeenth-century rationalist Fontenelle to tolerate poetry only as a social amusement. Now it has become an academic amusement in which the dogma that there is nothing outside the text repeats Haeckel's dogma that ancient and modern cosmogonies are only poetic fantasy, and at the same time clears the field for an exuberant and highly controlled preoccupation with intersubjectivity and intertextuality. So after the fashion, the post-structuralists have answered Snow's complaint about the rift between the two cultures by demonstrating a way to make the study of literature just as scientific as the study of nuclear physics. And in this operation, the critic, insofar as he is the prime agent for bridging the rift between insight and ignorance, becomes himself as much an embodied and

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faith-inspiring metaphor as Laplace was with his magical mathematics of probabilities.

J. Hillis Miller's 1986 presidential address to the Modern Language Association was an eloquent summarizing statement of this now not-so-new critical persuasion. The bias for a position of scientific integrity, once purged of all those entrancements of metaphor that bothered de Man, is apparent in Professor Miller's definition of "theory" as "the displacement of literary studies from a focus on the meaning of texts to a focus on the way meaning is conveyed." One may remember here Haeckel's concern with the fantastical way the meaning of the text of the universe had been conveyed to him by those who misinterpreted its "great eternal iron laws." Miller's remark that the triumph of theory "is evident in the violence and irrationality" of attacks on it repeats the scornful confidence with which Haeckel refers to those (distinguished contemporary physicists and biologists among them) who refused to abandon the "faith of our fathers" as they attacked his new monistic religion.

In the end, Miller hopes for a university in which diversity and heterogeneity produce not a permissive pluralism but "a fair and open fight for survival that is not even sure the fittest will survive but recognizes such an open fight as our only hope." Unlike Snow's pessimistic and anti-social literary intellectual, he has the tough optimism that suggests a romantic's open-ended faith in process but without the romantic's crippling metaphysical assumptions. At the same time, he has a counterculturist's commitment to liberating all previously repressed voices from the canonical past. "Let a hundred flowers bloom if they can," he continues, "even those that seem to me indubitably skunk cabbages and stinkweeds." But such a skeptically qualified optimism about the future of a truth-seeking endeavor that does not at the same time categorically close out the faith of the fathers would surely please Haeckel no more than Henry Adams, who had had his fill of skunk cabbages and stinkweeds. Nor would it imply that sustaining faith in the value of their operations that scientists now as always have needed.

Indeed, contemporary science might recognize in post-structural criticism the same threat that literature does. As Clifford Geertz has pointed out, the contemporary skeptical and revisionist spirit is "determined to examine science as through and through a social and cultural phenomenon." Such a "social constructionist" conception of science might seem as menacing to Hawking as it would to Wordsworth, both of whom need to believe that, whatever ontological affinities must be conceded, the distinction between daffodils and stinkweeds is grounded not only in the human intuition about the world but in the nature of things. To give up on this distinction is to court the horticultural disaster that resulted when the hundred flowers of that New Age optimist Chairman Mao produced nothing but skunk cabbages and stinkweeds.

Five years before C. P. Snow's lecture, Arthur Koestler in *The Trail of the Dinosaur* was commenting on the semantic mutations in national and international politics that were affecting the "false alternatives which obstruct clear thinking" and which (as Keats might have said) have produced so much irritable reaching in the post-World War II world. "It is not a novelty in history," he continues, "that a real dilemma which once seemed all-important is gradually drained of its meaning and becomes a pseudo-dilemma as new historical realities emerge." Perhaps the skeptical and revisionist spirit of post-structural critical theory, which in its own terms rejects the disjunction of science and literature as false, will ultimately have the effect of reconciling the two on the quite different terms of a common faith in common fathers. In this case, literature and science will be free to resume their too-often interrupted opposition to the pseudo-dilemma of metaphor or rational control, and literature will be able to continue to do for scientists and the rest of us what Niels Bohr said was its proper business: "remind us of harmonies beyond the grasp of systematic knowledge." FT

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Report

The WCC at Canberra: Which Spirit?

Lawrence E. Adams

In the theological world, Liberation theologies express the yearning for human wholeness. . . . They reread the Bible and reinterpret Christian tradition and theology from their experience of oppression and liberation. This must be the time we have to reread the Bible from the perspective of birds, water, air, trees, and mountains, the most wretched of the earth in our time. Learning to think like a mountain, changing our center from human beings to all living beings, has become our "responsibility" in order to survive.
—Prof. Chung Kyung-Hyung

Professor Chung—Korean Presbyterian, graduate of Claremont and Union Seminary, author of *Christianity through Asian Eyes*— suggested this theological development as part of her keynote address on the theme of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Canberra, Australia, "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation." Accompanied by a troupe of dancers with gongs, drums, and banners, and by Australian aborigines in paint and loincloths, she invoked ancestor spirits and indicated that the best "image of the Holy Spirit comes from the image of *Kwan In* . . . [who] is venerated as Goddess of compassion and wisdom in East Asian women's popular religion." Her message that theology, as well as politics and social life, must cease to be "anthropocentric" and become "life-centric" was not a typical Sunday-morning homily, and not only because she received a standing ovation.

World Council of Churches Assemblies, held every seven years, are always occasions for audits, or portraits, of the trends within, and the forces at work on, the larger church. Assemblies decide little and often leave the churches in some confusion, but they are always taken as milestone events, reference points for organized "Ecumenism" and the cause of Christian unity. The Seventh Assembly, held in Canberra for two weeks in February, was no exception. To the extent that the WCC displays the church universal, the Assembly was a kaleidoscope. Participants came from all continents and traditions; they dressed every imaginable way and spoke a multitude of languages. But for all its diversity, the Assembly was far from "representative" of the church; most of the world's Christians who are found in Catholic, Pentecostal, and evangelical fellowships would find little of the familiar in Canberra.

The WCC—constitutively a "fellowship of churches from every part of the world, which confesses the common calling of the churches to the glory of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"—also displayed at its Seventh Assembly the confusion over the mission and message of the church that follows from uncertainty over the confessional heritage of faith. The Assembly heard "progressive" theologians attempt to advance new formulations of the gospel, and felt the strength of Orthodoxy and evangelical Protestantism in asserting biblical doctrines. Participants worshipped according to ancient confessional liturgies and in sessions that seemed to call for adoration of earthbound "spirits" and even the earth itself.

After vigorous debate, participants issued statements condemning the Gulf war, passed on others to the WCC Central Committee calling for sweeping changes in South Africa, the Baltic states, and other hot spots, and embraced the WCC's own "new world order" scheme. Yet the Assembly virtually ignored the earthquake in world politics that resulted in democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe and the near demise of socialism. Finally, delegates embraced a plan to carry ecumenical work until the next Assembly in 1998 that emphasizes the "organic unity" of all churches and an extensive ethical agenda concentrating on "justice, peace, and the healing of all creation."

The Seventh Assembly also demonstrated that, like any permanent structure, the WCC is about power. It has no authority in the life of the member churches, but it does have resources and the ability to attract attention. In the words of one senior staffer, "the WCC does not speak for the churches, it speaks to the churches." The competition was heavy for control of that message and the instruments that would implement it. Long-time conflicts, inconsistencies, and divisions in WCC ranks threatened to break up the Assembly as governing bodies were elected and priorities set. Many participants had hoped this Assembly would effect the unveiling of a "new, comprehensive, ecumenical theology" built upon creation consciousness and a broadly defined work of the Spirit, but

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the effort ran headlong into established political and theological commitments. Even the widely supported cause of unity, which scored some advances, faced the competing claims of regional, gender, and confessional blocs.

I

If World Assemblies are defining moments, as the WCC would have it, the Seventh showed the cracks in the foundation the organization has built for a unified mission and message. At a press conference on the opening day of the Assembly, General Secretary Emilio Castro attempted to sum up his goals for the meeting by first repudiating the notion that it would focus on global crises. "The WCC is not the UN at prayer," he asserted. But, he said, the church must respond to the new political/social/spiritual environment, which did include the end of the Cold War and other global shifts, as the WCC discerns and defines its purpose.

Three priorities presented themselves to Castro: (1) Since the world is experiencing a resurgence in religion, and the decline of faith in modernity, the churches must resolve theological and philosophical questions: Is the Spirit exclusive, and the Christian faith unique, or is the Spirit (he? it? she?) manifest in all "spiritualities" and religions? (2) Since socialism has collapsed and "western liberalism is bankrupt," the church must search for alternative models of society. (3) Since the church is still divided, and various communions are at odds with others over diverse matters, progress toward visible unity must be reaffirmed and reasserted. Castro's categories were reflected in the agenda, and the contradictions inherent in this triad were fully played out.

The identity and purpose of the WCC was really the underlying primary issue of the Assembly, as the multiple priorities competed for attention and resources. Is the WCC a foundation for Christian unity? A joint political/social task force? A forum for speculative theology? A mission and support agency? All of the above? Does the world actually set the agenda for the church, or is the church led by the Spirit, who blows and moves wherever he wills? By the close of the Assembly, the program report once again affirmed the general understanding of the WCC as a "fellowship of churches . . . which confesses the common calling of the churches to the glory of the one God. . . . " But the question remained unanswered—especially to Orthodox and evangelical participants and to Roman Catholic observers—whether this affirmation really undergirds the continual work of the units of the WCC.

II

Contrary to Castro's protests, most of the early attention of the Assembly was political, with the major focus being on the war in the Persian Gulf—which was at its height in mid-February as the Assembly met. Beginning with the opening worship of the Assembly, virtually all occasions—sermons, speeches, or statements—included obligatory references to the crisis in the Gulf. Some delegates from the region were unable to attend or chose to stay home for pastoral reasons (an Iraqi delegation did participate). The Executive Council greeted Assembly delegates on the opening day with a statement on the war that reminded participants of previous commitments to "overcoming . . . the institution of war as a means to resolve conflict." The Council appealed for "an immediate cessation of hostilities" and immediate "resolution of the crisis." It urged "all concerned to take bold initiatives to stop the spiral of violence and death." The focus remained on the fact of war as an international crisis, rather than on its causes or rationale. Iraq was cited for occupying Kuwait, but the emphasis was on the allied military response in January, and on the premise that sanctions would have dealt effectively with Iraq.

Early exponents included a Lebanese Orthodox Archbishop, Aram Keshishian—later elected the new Moderator of the Central Committee—who proclaimed that the Gulf war was not a limited, regional conflict, but the beginning of World War III. The war would be long, destructive, and lead to major outbreaks of violence and reaction in the Middle East. Keshishian was the first to use the oft-repeated phrase: "This is neither a holy nor a just war, and cannot be." U.S. Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning, commenting on Keshishian's speech, agreed with the analysis, and went on to declare the just war tradition dead: "If Augustine and Aquinas were alive now, and had to contend with the smart bomb, they would be pacifists."

A strong controlling hand was evident in the construction of the program, the presentation of the themes, and the choice of speakers and formats. Who could dare to differ when a "public hearing" on the Gulf war, held ostensibly to allow the leaders to benefit from open discussion, turned out to be taken up with five disquisitions in vehement opposition to the allied war effort? One presentation by American Jim Wallis of *Sojourners*, in Canberra as an official WCC Adviser, cast most blame for the war on the "failed political and moral character" of the United States. The atmosphere did not welcome other points of view in the few minutes left for discussion. Some participants felt they were being indoctrinated.

The Assembly also held a required "peace march" through the streets of Canberra led by a group of children bearing a large globe. The march led participants to the Assembly worship tent, where they engaged in "worship on [sic] justice, peace, and the integrity of creation." The service had many of the characteristics of a mass meeting, with worshippers required to recite their resistance to various social evils

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and their commitment to remedial measures.

Some did dare to offer other viewpoints. Bishop Barry Rogerson, Church of England, asked during the Gulf hearing whether the WCC wanted simply to "feel good" about its own correctness, or actually to do some good. He and the rest of the British delegation, including the newly elected Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, stood firmly for taking a different line on the Gulf, insisting that a cease-fire call must recognize that Iraq was the initial aggressor and must demand Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and adherence to UN resolutions. Carey insisted that the unjust use of force by Iraq had to be dealt with directly. His view gained little support, and the final statement on the Gulf called for an unconditional cease-fire.

In contrast to their British brethren, church leaders from the U.S., led by National Council of Churches President Leonid Kishkovsky, WCC General Secretary Joan Campbell, and United Methodist Bishop Melvin Talbert used the occasion to release a "Call to the Churches" that described their opposition to the allied military response to Iraq's invasion. U.S. church leaders were quite intent on receiving in Canberra the recognition and support for their positions that had been denied them at home. Episcopal Bishop Browning indicated that he was certain that the 80 percent polling support for the war effort in the U.S. amounted only to sentiment for the troops and not support for the policy.

The debate on the final statement concerning the war—which took nearly all the time allotted for discussion of public issues—saw the Assembly initially adopt a repudiation of the Christian moral tradition that justifies the use of force in "last resort" circumstances in favor of a pacifist approach. But when some leaders of the WCC indicated that they could not support a statement that rejected centuries of moral tradition in the heat of a particular debate, the Assembly reconsidered and the pacifist provision was removed.

Other issues on the agenda—South Africa, the Baltics, intra-Soviet conflicts, indigenous peoples, El Salvador—were deferred to the Central Committee for action after time for discussion of public issues ran out. The final call in the Gulf resolution for an immediate cease-fire and a demand that the UN be in charge of the settlement—rather muted after the rhetorical fire—was premised on the beliefs that military force could not deal with the crisis, that sanctions could have been and could still be effective, and that the war would have destructive global impact. It is ironic that events that took so much time and energy in the Assembly had effectively ended by the time delegates got home and the early reports on the meeting were circulating.

III

One surprising result of the dominance of the Gulf war was that the Assembly avoided taking action on the demands of aboriginal and indigenous peoples. This was significant, because this concern had been (literally) drummed into the heads of delegates. From the opening worship and other opportunities for experiencing "aboriginal spirituality" to plenaries where calls for declarations of "aboriginal sovereignty" over Australia were heard, the efforts to link the Assembly with the aboriginal cause were obvious. Many aborigines left the assembly deeply disappointed after so much had been promised by all the attention.

The aboriginal cause went far beyond redressing the very brutal and horrific legacy of treatment of Australian aborigines by colonists. The tale, in fact, is most disturbing. A presentation depicting the means by which these indigenous groups were broken up, contained in camps, and forced into Western lifestyles was very stirring. The efforts of Christian individuals and churches in the aboriginal cause are acts of both mercy and repentance.

But the aboriginal showcase turned out to have larger purposes as a vehicle for the links forged and unveiled at Canberra between new theologies and environmental causes. This focus is becoming the center of the "justice, peace, and integrity of creation" (JPIC) ethical framework dominant in the WCC. The suggestion is that the complicity of the churches in environmental degradation and exploitation, and the central source of such practices in the doctrines of human dominion and stewardship, require new theological directions. "The earth is crying out" according to a WCC pre-Assembly document, and we therefore must explore what is wrong with our theology of creation. Those who are closest to the land, and whose spiritualities consider the earth to be sacred, are those best able to guide this new process. It is to be regretted, therefore, not only that much evil was done to aboriginal people, but that their very spirituality was violated by the introduction of Christianity in Australia.

An aboriginal theologian told the Assembly that land rights were important to aborigines not only for economic reasons, but because

> From the beginning of creation, we have centered our lives in the natural-spiritual world. We are deeply committed to God the Creator and to the earth in consciousness and in instinct. Only through our spiritual connection to the earth can we continue in our own identity. This is why Aboriginal people conceive of themselves in terms of the land. In our view the earth is sacred. It is a living entity in which other living entities have origin and destiny. It is where our identity comes from, where our spirituality begins, where the Dreaming comes from; it is where stewardship begins. Aboriginal people are bound to the earth in their spirit. By means of our involvement in the natural world we ensure our own well-being.

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While this session also ended with standing ovations and warm embraces, one also heard cries of "idolatry!" and "paganism!"—cries that the enthusiasts would presumably dismiss as the reactions of jaded Western rationalists.

Some of the underlying purposes for the aboriginal appeal were revealed in the reports of the four major work sections into which Assembly delegates were divided. These sections presented findings on long-term concerns, distinct from the work of the Public Issues committee, which focused on the Gulf and other matters. Section I (Giver of Life, Sustain your Creation!) was devoted to the "integrity of creation" leg of the JPIC triad. Section II (Spirit of Truth, Set us Free!) dealt with the other two legs. Section III folded "unity" issues, including Faith and Order, and missions into one report; Section IV's mandate was to interpret the doctrine of the Spirit and determine what he is saying to the churches. Section reports were received and accepted, after some discussion, by the Assembly as official findings.

Section I followed closely the results of the 1990 JPIC Consultation in Seoul and other intervening meetings. It lays out a "theology of creation," elaborates an "ethic of economy and ecology," and ends with specific demands for action from churches.

The theological section of this report received major modification in the course of debates over early drafts. The original draft suggested that human beings were really nothing special, that we are mere guests and recent arrivals on an earth that could get along just fine without us (a theme repeated by many speakers). It further asserted that the biblical concepts of dominion and stewardship were "arrogant" and to be rejected. This passage received much critical attention from evangelical and Orthodox delegates. Their efforts resulted in the final report asserting the centrality of human community and the image of God in man, as well as the special calling of human stewardship as the basis for environmental responsibility and "sustainability."

The ethical (read political and economic) program attempts to sketch out the "alternative models of society" called for by the General Secretary. The vision is that "people of different faiths . . . learn from each other's spirituality" to create "a world in which the needs of all creation are integrated with the workings of governments and international business." Beyond reforming current institutions, however, the report calls for "reform of the International Economic Order" and reconception of economic thinking to account for sustainability. Specifically, an "Earth Charter" modelled on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights—known as the Universal Declaration of Human Obligations Towards Nature—is to be enacted.

Education is to be altered to proliferate a "sustainable spirituality" based on "global interdependence." "Only the recognition on a worldwide scale of the oneness of creation can provide the critical global consciousness necessary to chart a new course for a sustainable future." Such a recognition will lead to

> a new type of mission, not into foreign lands but into "foreign" structures. By this term we mean economic, social, and political structures which do not conform to Christian moral standards. . . . It is for this reason that the churches have to make a great and continuous effort in morally equipping their people for their missionary work in the foreign structures of our time. . . . [Further,] the understanding of creation theology and of an ethic of economy and ecology should be reflected in the life and work of the church, through its study of the Bible, its teachings, hymns, liturgies, prayers, the institution of the sacraments, and through its witness.

The statement goes on to give marching orders to churches in specific regions for political action. As the staffer said, the WCC does speak to the churches, often in disturbing ways.

The Pelagian tone, utopian schemes, and "spiritual" sources of this manifesto make one wonder what church we are talking about. If fallenness can be attributed to the arrival of white settlers, and the "creation" has its own integrity rather than intrinsic brokenness, redemption becomes a matter of human effort and re-education. While the title of the report evokes the Giver of Life (and demands in the imperative that he sustain the creation) the only reference to Him in the document is in the introduction: the "Holy Spirit manifests God's energy for life present in all things." As for the Lord Himself, the introduction affirms that "through Jesus Christ all things have been made, and in him God's creation comes to its fulfillment." But other spiritualities and analytical frameworks would seem to have more influence on the ethical and even the ecclesiastical plans of the report.

One wonders why the extensive and Christological approaches to stewardship of such analysts as Britain's Donald Hay could not have found their way into this section report. Rather, the theological and scientific advisers to the section included a Canadian member of parliament, who is also a United Church minister, quoting William Stringfellow, Rachel Carson, and John Cobb; a theologian from Hong Kong who called for rejecting the "commander" image in Genesis of God giving shape and order to what he has made, in favor of the (female) "brooding spirit" image "which best addresses our current crisis"; and Larry Rasmussen of New York's Union Seminary, who linked the work of the Spirit with the growing environmental movement. Since a majority of participants were clergy anyway, few voices were heard with direct experience of economic and political institutions. Nor were there

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any who could bring the venerable Reformation perspective that creation is more than nature and also includes the differentiation of human community into institutions for the pursuit of the order God built into what he has made. Most Christian traditions acknowledge that all creation still bears these orders, and that general revelation, or common grace, or natural law ensure some knowledge of these in all cultures and religions. These traditions have acknowledged general revelation without overthrowing the unique special revelation of Christian faith.

In the midst of all the creation fascination and alternate spiritual modes, Section II (concerned with justice and peace issues) sounded like the old-time WCC religion. Led by the indefatigable Philip Potter, former WCC General Secretary, the report evoked now-familiar liberation themes. In comparison to Section I, the theological portion was meager and sketchy, perhaps because the liberationist writings on which it depends are so well known. In policy terms, Section II calls for the overthrow of Western-run, dependency-creating "Bretton Woods institutions" in favor of UN economic regulation, for a "New World Information and Communication Order," and for universal demilitarization. This report—as well as Section I's reiteration of the new economic order and the pervasive call throughout the Assembly for the United Nations to assert itself as the only legitimate international actor—does sing the old familiar songs. Overall, however, these traditional liberation concerns were either absorbed or left behind by the new green paradigm dominant at the Assembly.

The WCC does seem to have learned some things from recent world events. Section reports acknowledge that "the limits to bureaucratic control have become clearly visible" and that freedom is a universal human impulse. The experience of being challenged by Bishop Laszlo Tokes of Romania for past silence in the face of oppression was sobering. However, even with the presence of Tokes and other Eastern Europeans, attention to concerns for religious liberty was minimal. For example, the China Christian Council, successor to the official Three-Self Movement, was welcomed as a member of the WCC without any reference to continued restrictions on Chinese Catholics and other non-recognized churches. Has this created another situation in which the WCC will refuse to speak forcibly on behalf of persecuted Christians because of the membership of government-approved church leaders from a Communist country?

In any case, the lessons of recent history still have not translated in the WCC into some sense of reservation, of tentativeness regarding grand world-order schemes. Perhaps the "lack of a vital, coherent ecumenical theology" is indeed critical. These consistent tendencies may demonstrate the inclination of the WCC to detach ethics from the revelation and confession of the incarnate Word. One never heard in Canberra the Augustinian caution: "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek for the city which is to come." The Assembly planners would have benefited from pondering the wisdom of that great ecumenist and former WCC Mission Director, Lesslie Newbigin, whose recent work, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, challenges both the complacency of conservatism and the constant effort to reconstruct the gospel:

> What [Christ] did was to prepare a community chosen to be the bearer of the secret of the kingdom. . . . The church is not authorized to represent the reign of God, his justice and peace, in any other way than that in which Jesus represented it, namely by being partners with him in challenging the powers of evil and bearing in its own life the cost of the challenge. When Church and kingdom are set against each other, then the language of the kingdom can be used, and is used, to sacralize whatever is the contemporary program for justice and peace. The message of the kingdom then becomes a form of the law. It is a corpus of ethical demands. It has the effect which law divorced from gospel always has, of hardening the conscience and mightily increasing the power of evil.

IV

It should be no surprise, then, that the crucial concerns of Assembly deliberations even in the midst of the political activity and shifting paradigms turned on basic hermeneutical and confessional questions. Because of its theme and underlying agenda, the Assembly was faced throughout with the task of defining the nature of the Spirit, and the place of the Spirit in the Trinity. Focusing on the Spirit was a new departure for the WCC, undertaken in response to the growing demand in the churches for deeper spiritual reality. The theme was a particular concession to the historic emphases of the Orthodox churches. Other purposes were also at work, as the unsubtle efforts to assault delegates with aboriginal spirituality and other modalities attest. The uniqueness of Christ in relation to other "spiritualities" and the compatibility of Christianity with the "truth" found in other religions thus found its way into debate, becoming a major concern of Section IV, "Holy Spirit, Transform and Sanctify Us!"

The question that emerged at Canberra was a perennial hermeneutical conundrum—what determines the definition of truth: revelation or experience? How will we know in what and when the Spirit is at work? What are the signs? Is it a true Word from a certain authority, or a self-defining perception of need and crisis? Much of the background material and the presentations at Canberra, in the vein of such recent literature as that by John Hick and WCC Mission

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Director Christopher Duraisingh, posited the spirit without the Logos. They wanted spiritual energy without the Word to define and delineate, and without the Incarnation to give substance. They wanted grace without the body and the blood.

The two keynote addresses on the theme, which set up the major debates of the Assembly, were in great contrast. The first, from Parthenios, Ecumenical (Oriental) Patriarch of Alexandria, carefully argued the Orthodox perspective on the nature of the Spirit and his work. Parthenios asserted, "When we speak about the Holy Spirit, we are speaking about the Holy Trinity. There is no Holy Spirit apart from the Holy Trinity. We live in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. We do not separate them. Our God is One." His address, delivered in Greek, was polished and careful, serious and restrained. The other keynote address, that of Professor Chung, invoked—with its gongs, drums, and appeals to read Scripture from the perspective of birds, trees, and mountains—a very different spirit.

Professor Chung's speech resurrected the ancient debate over "syncretism"—the degree to which the Christian faith can and should accommodate other religious practices, and whether other faiths have sufficient truth without being troubled by the gospel of Christ. This question is of course crucial in defining the nature of mission and the identity of the church. Confronted with the charge of syncretism, Professor Chung responded that all churches are syncretistic, having adapted to and adopted aspects of their cultures; this is especially true, she said, of Western churches, with their accommodation of materialism, patriarchy, militarism, etc. Attempts to clarify this problem occupied much of the work in all sections, and it was frequently suggested that other religions offer a better basis for a new "theology of creation" than does Christianity. The debate also affected deliberation on issues of unity, dialogue with "other living faiths," and determining "what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

One has to wonder again about the degree to which "balance" was sincerely attempted in Assembly presentations. Those who held to orthodox formulations were always in reaction, required to respond to the "progressives." Was it an accident that Prof. Chung, a Korean Presbyterian, represented a perspective utterly alien and out-of-step with the majority of Korea's dynamic Presbyterian community?

The final reports, however, issued at the end of the Assembly after all the debates, did contain some clear affirmations, in great part due to Orthodox and evangelical efforts. From the report, for example, of Section IV, on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit: "Spirits must be discerned. Not every spirit is of the Holy Spirit. The primary criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit points to the cross and resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ."

It is perhaps naive to have to ask why a church council should even have to debate such questions and have to struggle to reaffirm orthodox positions. This clearly troubled the official Vatican retinue of observers, and cast a shadow on WCC-Catholic dialogue. There is a healthy dimension to being forced to look anew at the familiar; yet the motivation of many participants in Canberra seemed to flow, because of perceived past inadequacies and evils in the church, from regret over and even repudiation of the deposit of tradition and Scripture.

The marks of years of education in praxis-driven theology and in voguish process assumptions were clear in Canberrra. If revelation is expanding and truth perceived through experience, then the past can be both acknowledged and put behind. If the old gospel has served its purpose and "the spirit is doing a new thing" now, then ecumenism can move in radical new directions. If the old Liberalism was an adaptation to modernity, with its assumptions drawn from scientific materialism, in this new age the church must accommodate postmodern pluralism and resurgent spirituality. Historical theories of religious development also cause no embarrassment, as they demonstrate the relevance of past myths in the context of the needs of the day, and permit the development of new myths for our time and place which, according to the prevailing mindset at Canberra, demands religious unity and biospheric consciousness.

V

The atmosphere established by the Assembly leadership and those controlling the agenda provoked a variety of reactions. Even the final official program report contained some criticisms: "The cumbersome nature and the current patterns of the Assembly call for serious evaluation of the role of the Assembly as an efficient way of democratic policy-making." Youth delegates felt slighted in the election process and staged a demonstration under a large banner proclaiming "Ecumenical Suicide" because the old guard refused to replenish its ranks.

Yet despite complaints over pre-set agendas and excessive staff control of proceedings, some participants felt that their concerns eventually "were heard" and in some cases incorporated into Assembly reports. This was true in both public policy statements and theological affirmations. In the final days, the public policy debates became more lively and diverse as participants began to react to the directions being pushed by WCC staff. However, one evangelical leader noted: "Liberal Protestant experiential pluralism clearly is in control here." "Speculative theology" was indeed the norm. Some participants were disturbed by a disconnection between the often Trinitarian, confessional worship and the political and moral rhetoric. An evangelical caucus, formed early in the

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Assembly, issued programmatic recommendations to the policy committee, and, at the conclusion of the Assembly, released a letter to churches and fellow evangelicals regarding their experiences.

The evangelical letter reported a generally good experience of inclusion at Canberra, but called for that to be translated into representation on WCC commissions and in the staff. The signers raised concerns about the Assembly call for a coherent ecumenical theology, affirming the need for theological work but insisting that the "ecumenical movement needs a theology rooted in the Christian revelation as well as relevant to contemporary problems." The evangelicals also pointed out that "very inadequate attention was given in the Assembly to the dramatic and far-reaching changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe." That fact "raised questions about the way in which sections of the ecumenical movement supported the ruling ideologies in Eastern Europe."

Orthodox participants, whose churches have been members of the WCC since its formation, also issued a statement of concern to summarize their vigorous responses during Assembly debates. They noted the "increasing departure from the basis of the WCC"—which they defined as primarily to restore unity to the Church—and cited "a growing departure from biblically based Christian understandings" of the Trinity, salvation, the gospel, the doctrine of human beings as created in the image of God, and the nature of the church. They indicated that they were asking themselves, and would be considering further, "Has the time come for the Orthodox churches and other members to review their relations with the World Council of Churches?"—a thinly veiled threat to withdraw.

VI

In these responses of Orthodox and evangelical participants are contained the clues to the future patterns of ecumenism. The Assembly clearly elevated "organic unity" above other priorities in its final reports, but it also demonstrated how shallow that call might be. Is it to be based on a generalized "theism" and strong structures, or a strong confession of apostolic faith? Archbishop Carey pointed out that "grass roots ecumenism," including Protestant-Catholic-Orthodox fellowship and cooperation, was far outpacing the bureaucratic and clerical processes. Evangelicals and Orthodox found each other quickly at Canberra, and marvelled at the common ground they experienced.

Given the decline in the WCC of funds, members, and resources, and the concomitant need to cut staff and programs, the bureaucratic approach—which emphasizes organic (structural) cohesion while insisting on an open-ended dogmatic pluralism—can hardly compete with a catholic, Christocentric faith that is yet flexible and diverse regarding forms.

Surely the growing majority of the world's Christians—those in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and evangelical communities—will have little in common with a movement that abandons belief in the uniqueness of its Lord and his work of salvation. As he did on so many issues before the Assembly, Archbishop Carey clarified in both frugal and temperate words the questions raised by the Assembly:

> What, we must ask ourselves, is the truth that the Holy Spirit will lead us into? Surely it is the truth about God in Jesus Christ. It would be a distortion of John's gospel to assume that the "truth" mentioned is anything that might develop in the next two millennia. Even though we are agreed that there is such a thing as legitimate [doctrinal] development, the truth that the Holy Spirit leads us into must be Christocentric or it is not Christian. In other words, let us be careful not to separate the work of the Spirit from that of the Lord. . . . [The] last Assembly voiced a clear disquiet about the lack of concentrated theological work. And apparently Vancouver called for the development of a "vital and coherent theology." My experience of the WCC so far compels me to urge the WCC executive to make this a matter of extreme urgency. And, if I may be so bold, I want to suggest that we should look no further than the coherence of a Trinitarian framework of faith which has served the Church well enough for two thousand years. Yes of course we must do our hermeneutical work . . . but we are not required, and have no divine mandate, to create fresh theologies unrelated to the faith delivered to the saints.

This note evoked the work of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission (of which the Roman Catholic Church is a member) and its 1982 "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" document. BEM provided an important basis for sacramental and confessional fellowship among Christians. Yet this emphasis was seen in Canberra only in the use of its "Lima Liturgy" in one worship service, and in the work of Section III. To many, Faith and Order seemed overshadowed by the exploration of other spiritualities and alternate social models.

WCC leaders and staff do seem eager to capture the energy of Pentecostalism, the assurance and growth of evangelicalism, the authority of Catholicism, and the satisfying and mysterious depths of Orthodoxy for themselves. Nearly all the final documents stressed the importance of "incorporating" (or domesticating?) these groups. The rationalism of "German theology" and the accommodations to modernity of Liberalism have had unhappy effects in the Protestant churches of Europe and North America—out-of-touch bureaucracies and declining parishes. Now the hunger of

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church members, and the need for institutional survival, have forced some new directions. Yet those so insistent on stamping political correctness on the churches and being guided by praxis apparently find themselves more comfortable with the spirits of the age, or the "new age," than with the paraclete.

The Assembly, after all was said and done, ended with vague and ambiguous consensus documents and appeals for further studies. Its reports, as is typical of consensus documents, have something for everyone; any emphasis or orientation can find some support in the Assembly's deliberations and recommendations. Evangelicals and Orthodox participants will have to wait and see whether the reassurances that their concerns were "heard" will be translated into renewed vigor for mission and evangelism and clear biblical commitments. These matters are now in the hands of the new Central Committee, which is still dominated by Western clergy even after the formulaic elections, and the Geneva-based staff. Yet believers may still find in the WCC an opportunity for common fellowship and mission, as did some of the evangelical participants. It is not totally out of the question that along with the Orthodox and others, biblical Christians could lead the ecumenical world in new directions. As the Assembly theme pointed out, this clearly depends on the renewing, transforming, and sustaining work of the Holy Spirit.

VII

I had the delight of going immediately from Canberra to Singapore, where I visited friends who are serving the church there as seminary teachers and preachers. I visited churches filled with new believers, many who came out of animist or Buddhist upbringings, often alone in their families, to confess faith in the risen Christ. The ambiguity regarding the nature of the gospel in the WCC—in contrast to its elaborate world order visions—could not be in starker relief to the clarity and assurance (without smugness and with much charity and mercy) of those missionaries and national Christians I visited in Singapore.

Nor was their faith without learning or indifferent to their pluralistic culture; on the contrary, their scholarship and concern for effective proclamation seemed far more profound than the blurred lines of Canberrra. They knew of *Kwan In* in Singapore too—she is found on tea mugs, T-shirts, and family altars. People buy joss sticks and burn small sacrifices on street corners and elsewhere to earn a little favor from her.

Pursuing perpetual obeisance to her, and paying "lion dancers" to drive evil spirits out of homes and shops or burning "hell money" to appease ancestors: this is what many believers in Singapore and all over Asia have found deliverance from in the grace and mercy of the gospel of Christ. It is not dissimilar to the deliverance from empty, hopeless secularism that some in the West have experienced. They have forsaken the idols who are but wood, clay, silver, and gold for a living God. If this seems to lack in "inclusiveness" or in sensitivity to "other living faiths," perhaps it is only part of the offense that has always come when the gospel is truly preached and practiced. FT

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Review Essay

How Churches Crack Up: The Case of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Gilbert Meilaender

MEMOIRS IN EXILE: CONFESSIONAL HOPE AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT. By JOHN H. TIETJEN. *Fortress Press. 368 pp. $19.95.*

In the spring of 1969, near the completion of my first year as a student at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, John Tietjen was named the seminary's president. Most of the students, I among them, knew almost nothing about him, but he was quickly to become a central figure in theological controversies that were raging within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod—controversies centering especially on the seminary in St. Louis. Those disputes culminated in events that took place early in 1974: Tietjen's suspension from office, a moratorium (in support of him) by most of the faculty and student body, and, finally, creation of a seminary "in exile." I have always been thankful that I was gone before those days arrived, but I note here for the record that—while a student—I did not find much to approve in Tietjen's leadership, and even the bittersweet experience of reading his memoir has not changed my mind on that question.

Memoirs in Exile is not a very well-written book, and it may be rather hard going for anyone not already initiated into the story it recounts. The book moves back and forth between accounts of meetings and chronological detail to a kind of theological interpretation grounded in the Christian language of death and new life. To the interpretation I will return below. The mass of detail I will not seek to summarize or recount—though any future historian who cares to tell the story of this struggle will surely have to weigh other evidence (e.g., of the degree of unanimity among faculty and students; of the reasons why, years later, "Seminex" finally ceased to exist) when evaluating Tietjen's account. What this memoir does make clear, however, is that the central years of John Tietjen's professional life were absorbed by this struggle, that he genuinely felt himself called by God to play the role he did, and that this conviction cost him a great deal of ease which might otherwise have been his. It is right that he should tell his story.

What was the controversy about? In the most obvious sense, it was about the Bible—what kind of book it is and how it should be read. The issues here are legion. Missouri Synod theologians had traditionally affirmed the inerrancy of the Bible, and, although such a term can mean many things, in practice it meant certain rather specific things: harmonizing of the various biblical narratives; a somewhat ahistorical reading of the Bible in which there was little room for growth or development of theological understanding; a tendency to hold that God would not have used within the Bible literary forms such as myth, legend, or saga; an unwillingness to reckon with possible creativity on the part of the evangelists who tell the story of Jesus in the Gospels or to consider what it might mean that they write that story from a post-Easter perspective; a general reluctance to consider that the canons of historical exactitude which we take as givens might have been different for the biblical authors.

For at least a decade and a half before the appointment of Tietjen to the presidency of Concordia Seminary, some of its faculty had begun to turn away from such understandings—though without claiming that this turn meant giving up biblical inerrancy. And within the congregations of the synod concern about what was happening at the seminary had begun to grow. (In order even to begin to comprehend this story, one must understand first that Missouri Synod people care deeply about church doctrine, and second that Concordia Seminary in St. Louis—where classical theological training was offered with considerable rigor—had been revered in the affections of Missourians. At its 1962 convention, the synod had received a public apology from Martin Scharlemann, professor of New Testament at the seminary. Scharlemann apologized for troubling the church and withdrew from circulation—though, significantly, he did not retract—a paper that seemed to turn away from the synod's traditional understanding of the Bible. It is one of the ironies of this story that, a decade later,

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Scharlemann became one of the five members of the faculty who refused to participate in the "exodus." He later became acting president of the seminary after Tietjen was suspended from office.)

As expressions of concern increased, they were generally met with soothing, reassuring words: nothing was really changing. Tietjen himself writes, "I did not appreciate what I thought was less than candor in the seminary's repeated claims that nothing had really changed in C[oncordia] S[eminary] teaching." Yet, shortly after assuming the presidency, he initiated a research project designed to determine attitudes toward the seminary within the synod. The survey results suggested widespread support but also pockets of concern and opposition, and Tietjen concluded that "work needed to be done in order to reassure the small number of clergy who had reservations about our Lutheran commitment." But reassurance, in addition to carrying an air of condescension, was simply more of the same old approach, an approach that caused the infection to fester until it could no longer be controlled. What was needed—and what the synod and seminary never managed—was open, honest study and inquiry. Opponents of the seminary, confident that they were in possession of the truth, did not want that. But in many ways the seminary did not either; for truly open inquiry would have made clear that old positions were not simply being given new nuance but were in fact being scrapped.

Within weeks after Tietjen became president of Concordia Seminary, J. A. O. Preus, candidate of the conservative movement, was elected president of the synod. Preus made it clear that he intended to deal with "problems" at the seminary, and, indeed, over the next five years he did just that. The structure of Tietjen's memoir tends to make the story one of Preus vs. Tietjen. I think this is a mistake, albeit an understandable one. Each man was at least as much mastered by as master of forces at work within the synod. And perhaps the greatest flaw of Tietjen's leadership was his inability to understand that his quarrel was not simply with Preus but with a sizable segment of the synod. The ultimate consequence of this flaw was the egregious miscalculation of the "exodus," the walkout by students and faculty. With one stroke the faculty under Tietjen's leadership accomplished what Preus could not have done within his lifetime: empty the seminary of its troublesome faculty. The miscalculation lay in thinking that the synod would be unable to carry on and would have to seek terms of peace: "Moratorium had to become exile to produce the kind of confrontation that would make genuine reconciling dialogue possible." In the event, however, all it produced was permanent exile—with Seminex finally being absorbed into various seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (formed in 1988 through merger of the other large Lutheran bodies in this country), from which the Missouri Synod is more and more estranged.

When we look back at the controversy, we can see that it was not only about the Bible; it was about authority within the church. Not about the integrity of any individual's faith in God, but about the integrity of the church's public teaching. Within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Concordia Seminary had played a crucial role. There the clergy of the synod were taught and shaped. Questions that raised difficulties within pastoral conferences or districts of the synod would often be referred to the seminary faculty for consideration and comment. The faculty's journal, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, guided and shaped theological discussion among clergy of the synod. In effect, the seminary faculty functioned as magisterium within the synod, directing the church's public teaching. When division within that magisterial voice became evident and pronounced, where could one turn for the authoritative voice of the church in the present moment?

Tietjen's narrative makes clear how central this concern was for Preus. Somehow, somewhere, through someone, the church had to be able to speak in the present. Who was to determine where this voice was to be found? And how could it be determined? Neither the seminary's faculty majority nor the conservative movement in the synod ever satisfactorily answered that question. Preus waged the battle in the biennial conventions of the synod, where—having gained a majority of the voting delegates and control of floor committees—his forces could pass doctrinal resolutions designed to express the public teaching of the church.

It had always been the synod's understanding that matters of doctrine were to be decided only by the Word of God, the Bible. Convention votes, though determined of course by simple majority, only expressed the synod's understanding of what the Word of God said. I shall not attempt to defend the peculiarities of this notion, which may have the Word of God speaking quite differently every other year. It was, at any rate, an attempt to find a present voice for the church. But it was a very unsatisfying attempt—to have weighty theological questions determined by delegates who came together for a few days with little prior study of the issues, who were sometimes inclined to suppose that such questions admitted of "yes" or "no" answers, and who passed judgment after rather limited opportunity for discussion and debate.

I once tried to explain the system to Julian Hartt, and I allowed that it might well be one of the worst ways to deal with serious theological questions. Methodist that he was, he responded by assuring me that bishops were capable of at least as much harm. Perhaps so. But a church body that professes to take doctrine as seriously as Missouri does was—and is—done no honor by this method of "solving" theological problems. Those who lose the vote rarely feel that

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their voice has been heard, and they are likely to feel that they are bowing not to the Word of God but to a stronger and better organized political faction.

The position of the faculty majority was not much more satisfactory, however, and it had the added disadvantage of sounding evasive. The faculty was seeking a way to make an absolutely necessary distinction—between what the Bible records and what it teaches. They did this in two ways. First, they held that the Bible's authority lies in the basic message—the Gospel—that it carries. It is this message that elicits saving faith from human beings, and, hence, must be controlling in the church's life.

The difficulty, of course, lies in the fact that within the Bible this message is filled with purportedly historical content. The Gospel itself may be stated simply: God loves you for Jesus' sake. One may trust that message and find hope in it without, for example, believing that Jesus was, as the creed puts it, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary." Conservatives were concerned that some members of the seminary faculty were beginning to affirm a Gospel that was separated from its historical embodiment as witnessed in Bible and Creeds. Such an affirmation, though it might well elicit and sustain "saving faith" in any individual, might not be adequate for the church's public teaching of "the faith." This equivocal use of the language of faith never really served well to clarify the faculty's position, and it almost inevitably seemed to some to evade the issue of authority within the church.

One of the Synod's clergy—admittedly one who was no theological scholar—once explained to me why he sided with the faculty majority: "I don't believe in the virgin birth; I believe in the One who was born of the Virgin." Everything is here concentrated in the affirmation of an individual's trust in Jesus, but the question of public teaching is avoided. This pastor was not eager to try another formulation—"I don't believe in the resurrection; I believe in the One who was raised"—but there was no reason he should not have. We face here a very difficult theological issue—at least for a faith that has been grounded not just in metaphysical abstractions but in particular historical claims. Karl Barth nicely formulated the issue:

> Why conception by the Holy Spirit and why birth of the Virgin Mary? Why this special miracle which is intended to be expressed in these two concepts, side by side with the great miracle of the Incarnation? Why does the miracle of Christmas run parallel to the mystery of the Incarnation? A noetic utterance is so to speak put alongside the ontic one. If in the Incarnation we have to do with the thing, here we have to do with the sign. The two should not be confused. The thing which is involved in Christmas is true in and for itself. But it is indicated, it is unveiled in the miracle of Christmas. But it would be wrong to conclude from that, that therefore "only" a sign is involved, which therefore might even be deducted from the mystery. Let me warn you against this. It is rare in life to be able to separate form and content. . . . All we can say is that it pleased God to let the mystery be real and become manifest in this shape and form. But again that cannot mean that over against this factual form of the miracle we are as it were free to affirm it or not to affirm it. . . . We perhaps best understand the relation of matter and form, which is presented here, by taking a look at the story, familiar to you all, of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:10): "That ye may know, that the Son of Man hath power to forgive sins. . . . Arise, take up thy bed and go thy way." "That ye may know . . ."; in this way the miracle of the Virgin Birth is also to be understood. What is involved is the mystery of the Incarnation as the visible form of which the miracle takes place. We should ill have understood Mark 2, if we wanted so to read the passage, that the chief miracle was the forgiveness of sins, and the bodily healing incidental. The one thing obviously belongs of necessity to the other. And so we should have to give a warning, too, against parenthesizing the miracle of the *nativitas* and wanting to cling to the mystery as such. One thing may be definitely said, that every time people want to fly from this miracle, a theology is at work, which has ceased to understand and honor the mystery as well. . . .

But then, of course, the seminary's opponents would use similar reasoning to suggest that the church's public teaching must regard the Jonah story as a straightforward historical account, and soon no distinction at all would be possible between what the Bible records and what it teaches, what is central to the faith and what is not.

Given the difficulties of really working through such an issue within the synod, the seminary faculty took refuge in a second answer to the authority question: What was binding upon the synod's pastors and theological professors was the collection of Lutheran Confessional writings from the sixteenth century (gathered in the *Book of Concord*). At their ordination Lutheran pastors vowed to teach in accord with these writings, and the synod's own bylaws affirmed that the Scriptures and these writings (understood as an accurate exposition of biblical teaching) were the standard for the church's public doctrine. This meant that resolutions of synodical conventions, while no doubt offering useful direction and guidance, could not be binding and could not be used as a standard for assessing orthodoxy.

As a technical, legal argument this had considerable merit. But as a response to the concern to locate an

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authoritative voice within the present-day church, it was not very helpful. Moreover, it was difficult to explain why the church could forge new confessions of faith in the sixteenth century but could not do so in the present. How to do so is not easy to say, and, as I noted above, resolutions passed by synodical conventions did not seem a very happy solution. Still, the problem was a real one, and it did not help much to take one's stand in the sixteenth century and refuse to budge.

These are problems of enormous importance and difficulty for any church body that lacks a clearly defined magisterium, and they are no doubt accentuated by the democratic spirit of American Christianity. Perhaps it is no very damning criticism to note that they were never satisfactorily resolved by the synod. Tietjen's own account of the governance problems experienced at Seminex makes clear that no real solution was found there, either. The heady days of activism had their effect in producing a "town meeting" system of governance for the seminary in exile. Decisions were to be made only on the basis of procedures aimed at shaping consensus. When Tietjen reverted to thinking of himself as called to administer and direct the affairs of Seminex, he came under considerable criticism for "improper usurping of community power by administrators." It is hard not to feel sorry for him. The wonder, though, is that it appears never to have made him sympathize at all with J. A. O. Preus' attempt to find a way to make authoritative decisions within the synod.

Tietjen does draw from his experiences a lesson about what he calls "the paradox of institution." This is simply the old tension between spirit and structure reasserted in a characteristically Lutheran way. "Institution is essential for the church's ministry," and at the same time institution is inimical to the church's ministry. "Institution requires the compromise of integrity. Everyone has to engage in compromise in order to accomplish anything meaningful . . . but institution asks us to compromise to the point of selling our soul." "We have to make the church's ministry our priority and use institution as means to ministry. Then, in spite of our best efforts, we have to acknowledge and confess our sins, knowing that our best efforts will not be good enough."

I admit to considerable sympathy for such a vision of life, but we can see here why Lutherans have been such poor institution builders. In the heady days of protest the seminary faculty and students could suppose that their movement was free and spontaneous—a supposition that Tietjen, retrospectively reflecting on events, terms a "myth" about the origins of Seminex. But when the heady days are gone and structures are needed to sustain a movement, Lutherans—with their keen sense that structures may commit us to supporting what is less than ideal—are likely to have trouble distinguishing better from worse institutions, so taken will they be by the memory of a moment when the spirit seemed free of any compromising demands of structure. One wonders whether things might not have gone better for both seminary and synod had John Tietjen learned this painful lesson a little sooner.

Both Concordia Seminary and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod had cultivated a kind of family atmosphere, characteristic perhaps of relatively small church bodies with ethnic origins. When the battle broke out, therefore, it had the bitterness and humorlessness of a fierce family quarrel. Two examples will suffice. After the walkout, the reconstituted seminary administration cut off access for Seminex faculty and students to the seminary's excellent theological library. Whatever events may have made such a move seem necessary, Tietjen notes a "bizarre development" to which it led. Alfred Fuerbringer, Tietjen's predecessor as seminary president, had supported and joined in the exodus. The library had been built during Fuerbringer's presidency and named after his father, who had also been the seminary's president. Yet, even Alfred Fuerbringer was denied admittance to the library. In such action there is something mean-spirited, for which no justification can be offered. Side by side with that kind of story we should, however, place an example like the following. At a point in Tietjen's account where he speaks of a number of people rallying to his cause, he includes this footnote:

> I remember [my wife] Ernestine's report of her conversation with the Jewish woman who worked in the tailor shop not far from home. I had dropped off a suit to be mended. When Ernestine went to pick it up, the Tietjen name made a connection with the woman. "If only I had known who your husband was," she said, "I would have said something to him. Tell him: God will take care of him; the truth will come out." As Ernestine looked at the woman's wrist, she saw the tattooed numbers from one of Hitler's death camps.

It is a little disconcerting to think of Tietjen harboring, for better than a decade, this story with its suggestion that his opponents were comparable to Nazis. Here too there is meanness of spirit.

The woman in the tailor shop might never have recognized the Tietjen name, and some of the meanness and lovelessness of the controversy might have been muted, had it not become a media event. The seminary walkout of faculty and students was a carefully orchestrated occasion for publicity in both newspapers and television. I have grave reservations about the wisdom—or the churchmanship displayed—in seeking such publicity, though this is surely a question on which the various participants will never be agreed.

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If the issues involved in the seminary struggle—how to read the Bible and how to locate authority within the church—continue to trouble church bodies, we do well to consider carefully whether it can be of any benefit to tackle them via the news conference. In our time and place the media will almost always be on the side of those who claim conscientious freedom; they will seldom be able to understand sympathetically a church's need for a magisterial voice to articulate and sustain its public teaching. Almost never will helpful theological discussion be fostered in this way; almost always the church will be harmed.

In response, of course, we may note that the seminary's opponents were not much interested in theological discussion. True enough. Nevertheless, perhaps the church may be served best by a willingness to lose—at least for the moment—theological arguments without giving up on each other. Ultimately, we need not expect that the world will be sympathetic to the needs of the church, and we may do each other a disservice when we play by its rules or make appeals designed to elicit its attention and support.

One will look in vain for any shred of humor in *Memoirs in Exile*, and in this lack it accurately epitomizes the struggle it recounts. Humor requires some distance, some sense of irony, some sense even that we may be mistaken. From Tietjen's perspective opponents of the seminary were absolutely persuaded that their cause was righteous, and I know he does not misread them. But perhaps he does not appreciate how much a Missourian he himself remains in this respect. We can see this if we turn, finally, to the interpretation of the struggle that he offers. *Memoirs* would be a better book if the historian's interpretation more clearly grew out of the events recounted. It does not; rather, it seems simply to run alongside the mass of detail. But there is, at least, an interpretation offered, and it is theological: God was at work in these events, bringing death to an institution that had outlived its usefulness and working new life beyond that death.

This interpretation is grounded in biblical themes—the vision of the Hebrew prophets of a branch growing from the seemingly dead stump of the Davidic royal line, and, of course, the central Christian affirmation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Concordia Seminary died, but out of that dead stump grew the new and vibrant community that was Seminex. It, in its turn, had to die, but only in order to contribute to the new work of God in creating the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

I am a little astonished at the ease with which a man who spent so many years immersed in serious theological dispute should suppose himself able to discern the hand of God at work in our world. When, after the exile became permanent, Concordia Seminary was rebuilt into a large seminary once again, the synod's conservatives tended to see in that rebirth the hand of God. How to choose between their reading and the interpretation in *Memoirs* is a fine theological problem. But when each is offered in utter confidence there is little to do except choose.

Would that we could at least learn to choose in the spirit of Gregory the Great, as Dante portrays him in Canto XXVIII of the *Paradiso*. Beatrice explains to Dante the ordering of the hierarchies of angels in the celestial realm, a question on which there had been difference of opinion. It turns out, as she explains, that the correct view had been that put forward in a work ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite. Gregory's view, by contrast, had been mistaken. And how did Gregory, arriving in heaven, respond to the sad news that he had been wrong?

When Dionysius with ardent zest
Pondered these orders of angelic bliss,
He named them in this way, the true and best;

But Gregory then differed over this,
And when his eyes were opened on this scene
He smiled to see how he had gone amiss.

Nothing is more serious or worthy of debate than theology. And for just that reason a little proleptic laughter is always in order.

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Books In Review

Religion and Public Life

UNDER GOD: RELIGION AND AMERICAN POLITICS. By GARRY WILLS. *Simon and Schuster. 445 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by **Mark A. Noll**

GARRY WILLS IS an indefatigable iconoclast, and the icons that have felt the sting of his wit are as diverse in time as in form. They include ideas, like the facile notion of Lockean hegemony in the Revolutionary period or unreflective confidence in the Catholic Church after Vatican II. Even more, Wills has pursued personalities—the domineering lusts of the Kennedys, the psychological quirks of Richard Nixon, the genial vapidity of Ronald Reagan.

With this book, he turns on one of the most persistent bits of modern conventional wisdom, the assumption that the political influence of religion will (or should) inevitably decline as American society becomes more "modern." Not so, argues Wills in a work marked more by thematic coherence than a tidy procession of arguments. The political power of religion is, in fact, *increasing* as the United States enters its third century. Furthermore, and in the face of implicit assumptions from all points on the political compass, the history of the United States shows that the beneficial influence of religion *grows* when it is divorced from the machinery of government.

Wills makes these basic points in a wide-ranging series of essays growing out of his work as a reporter during the 1988 presidential campaign. The book's eight essays are organized loosely around the religious backgrounds of candidates (Gary Hart, Pat Robertson, Jesse Jackson), the political implications of dogmas held by Protestant evangelicals (premillennial eschatology and anti-evolutionism), and contested issues in recent public life (pornography, abortion, and the separation of church and state).

The operative words are "wide-ranging" and "loosely," for Wills' muse carries him far and wide. As an example, the essay featuring Jesse Jackson includes also a historical overview of black millenarianism, a profile of Atlanta's Andrew Young, an assessment of Abraham Lincoln's faith in relation to the traditional beliefs of black Americans, a refinement of historian Jon Butler's recent contention that slavery amounted to a "spiritual holocaust," and an evaluation of the struggle for power in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. And all spinning around a close-up look at Jesse Jackson, the person, the seminarian, the campaigner, the orator, and the minister.

This kind of pyrotechnic virtuosity would be irritating if Wills were not so consistently thought-provoking. In this instance, he catches very nicely the ambiguities of a middle-class Andrew Young having to learn about civil rights from the television set. He makes a telling historical contrast between Julia Ward Howe's exultant use of imagery from the Apocalypse of St. John and Lincoln's sober preference for the "suffering servant" passages in Isaiah and Luke. He shows that blacks, who were brutally stripped of their indigenous religions, nonetheless discovered truths of unanticipated liberation in the slaveholders' faith. And he makes a spirited defense of Jesse Jackson's behavior after the death of Dr. King.

For my money, the section on Jackson would have been even better if Wills had directed the same gimlet eye at Jackson that he used in scrutinizing the campaigns of Hart, Robertson, Dukakis, and (in passing) Bush. Disappointment in this matter notwithstanding, Wills materially advances the book's thesis with a sensitive depiction of Jackson's base in black religious practice and a description of the unexpectedly strong showings he made in a few white areas where his persona as a man of God emerged.

OTHER SECTIONS of the book are equally rewarding. A splendid discussion of William Jennings Bryan, the Scopes Trial, and the general struggle by evangelicals against evolution is richly insightful on the Scopes circus of 1925 as well as on the deeper meanings of anti-evolutionism then and since. For Wills, all the old truisms are bunk. Clarence Darrow and H. L. Mencken, purported defenders of scientific enlightenment and highbrow culture, are successfully portrayed as manipulative social Darwinists. Bryan, in Wills' forgiving eye, appears at "the Monkey Trial" not as a doddering old Puritan, but as "the most important evangelical politician of the century," as a perceptive champion of the common people, and as one who understood only too well how the scientific pretensions of the better sort can lead to the degradation of the masses. Wills thinks that, by contrast, later anti-evolutionists, because they shifted the focus of their concern from the social impact of evolution to technical defenses of biblical details, have both forfeited a vibrant Christian tradition and condemned themselves to intellectual irrelevance.

Equally challenging is Wills' painstaking unpacking of the process that transformed Gary Hartpence, Church of the Nazarene seminarian and inheritor of strict fundamentalist morality, into Gary Hart, the obtuse candidate who never could get it through his head that Americans are more offended

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by arguments for amorality than the commission of immoralities. The same could be said for his treatment of Thomas Jefferson as a sincere (if exceedingly idiosyncratic) Christian; of Pat Robertson as a curiously logical combination of high-born Southern gentry and down-home, born-again pentecostalism; of Francis Schaeffer as the fundamentalist leader who, often through misguided learning, nonetheless restored a public conscience to white evangelicals; of the laudable impulses but questionable tactics of those who attempt to preserve public morals through censoring pornography; of how details concerning end-times prophecy have become political meat and drink to some conservative evangelicals; of how leftist opposition to anti-pornography legislation flies in the face of liberal instincts to control the marketplace; and how rightist support for the same laws violates conservative professions to favor a free market.

ANY READER with the least interest in Wills' topics will find much about which to quibble and much as well with which to disagree heartily. For my tastes, there is too much authorial pretense, as Wills, for example, unfurls his learning to show how Col. Robert Thieme missed a couple of Greek accents during a sermon/lecture or how Tocqueville implied subtle ironies through prepositions that his translators obscured. Wills also makes a few simple mistakes: Denmark never had a Calvinist state church, neither William Jennings Bryan nor anyone else ever posed a clash between Augustinianism and Lutheranism, Calvin's own predestinarianism emphatically did not extend to finding the right spouse, and the theonomist Rousas John Rushdoony does not inhabit the same realm as "name it and claim it" pentecostals.

Of several debatable assessments, I found most dubious Wills' assault upon the double-track approach taken by the Roman Catholic Church to questions of public morality. He correctly notes that the Catholic Church has spoken by divine right to its own members and argued with natural reason in public. But then in bashing left and right—against Mario Cuomo for giving so little credence to the in-house morality of his own Catholic Church as he defends a tolerance for abortion in public and against the Catholic bishops for attempting to impose their "obsolete" beliefs about abortion on the general public—the discussion is muddled.

Easy as it may be to trip up both the bishops or the governor, confusion over abortion does not in the least vitiate the basic wisdom of the Catholic Church's parallel modes of moral reasoning. Confusion precisely in these two realms has wreaked great havoc in American public life, whether from crusading evangelicals eager to impose a particular interpretation of Scripture on the general populace or from crusading secularists eager to prevent the legitimate expression of moral reasoning from a religious group. Some strategy of parallel discourse is absolutely essential for believers who also wish to be contributing citizens in a pluralistic society. Whatever difficulties Roman Catholics may have with abortion or other specific issues, their strategies of moral argument are an inspiration for all who struggle toward a way of being both faithful to their religious beliefs and active in society.

To its great credit, *Under God* stimulates a wide range of such engaged responses. On some of his judgments, Wills may be wrong. Most often, however, he sets the record straight, blows away obfuscation, restores sanity to the tangled web of politics and religion, and, above all, sustains his thesis: Religion does play, and always has played, a major role in American politics. American politics would be a desperate venture if religion did *not* play such a role. The real question is not *whether* religion should play a role, but *what kind of* religion and *how skillful* the playing.

Not the Worst of Times—Or the Best

THE FIRST UNIVERSAL NATION: LEADING INDICATORS AND IDEAS ABOUT THE SURGE OF AMERICA IN THE 1990S. By BEN J. WATTENBERG. *The Free Press. 418 pp. $22.95.*

Reviewed by **Peter Shaw**

BEN WATTENBERG is America's most prominent optimist. He is notoriously reassuring about the condition of what has in his mind become "the first universal nation." Its influence, he suggests, is global—not only militarily but in vital economic and social areas as well. Wattenberg's long-standing optimism about developments leading to this apotheosis has to a great extent been confirmed by recent events abroad such as the fall of Communism and the reassertion of American power in the Middle East. When it comes to conditions at home, though, the situation is less clear.

Nevertheless, Wattenberg's current gathering of op-ed articles from the past ten years (along with afterthoughts and supporting tables) shows him usually to have had the better of the argument against the relentless pessimism that pervades so much of contemporary social analysis. Somehow the pessimists managed to dominate public discussion during a period of American success that might have been expected to produce nothing but cockeyed optimists. Paul Kennedy's *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), with its warning against military expenses and imperial overstretch, was a representative work of the time. Against it, Wattenberg notes that U.S. spending on defense as a percentage of GNP has actually dropped, that the

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country is not in economic decline, and that Japan is not about to surpass us. In sum, Wattenberg (characteristically) concludes, Kennedy is "wrong, wrong, wrong."

Wattenberg is convincing when he combines statistics and impressions to argue that America has grown into a global power through its economic productivity and the force of its ideas instead of through imperial conquest. "It is not an accident," he refreshingly writes, "that America holds the technological lead in aircraft, airlines, pharmaceuticals, computers, biotechnology, plastics, synthetic fibers, telecommunications equipment, and petroleum exploration, to only begin a very long list."

Two recent news stories confirm Wattenberg's optimism; indeed, they almost seem to have had his name on them. The first reveals that contrary to some dozen years of talk about the economy's decline in manufacturing jobs, drop in output, and shift to an unproductive service society, American manufacturing has actually been on a steady rise. The second story shows America not just holding onto but increasing its lead in science. "The United States," the *New York Times* reports, "publishes the highest quality scientific articles, at least as judged by the number of citations they receive, and by this measure the quality of American work has steadily increased over the last decade." So long, therefore, as the terms of debate about America's condition are overall optimism/pessimism, Wattenberg serves as an effective counter to the fashionable defeatism of recent years.

ON THE OTHER HAND, when the debate is not exclusively about the broadest overall measures or the macrocosmic perspective, Wattenberg's arguments do not always persuade. He defends American education on the evidence of increased government spending, high ratings for American universities by East Asian scholars, public opinion surveys that show a return of confidence in higher education, and Harvard Provost Henry Rosovsky's report that his university asks "who is the best person in the world to fill a particular vacancy, and then we try to convince that scholar to join our ranks."

But government spending can be ineffective, East Asian scholars are likely to be concerned with scientific education alone, public opinion is no objective guide to reality (elsewhere Wattenberg defends lower schools because 77 percent of children "like school"), and Provost Rosovsky, apart from having obviously self-serving motives, has shown himself to be a disseminator of educational trends that Wattenberg himself opposes elsewhere—as when he writes, "The ideology

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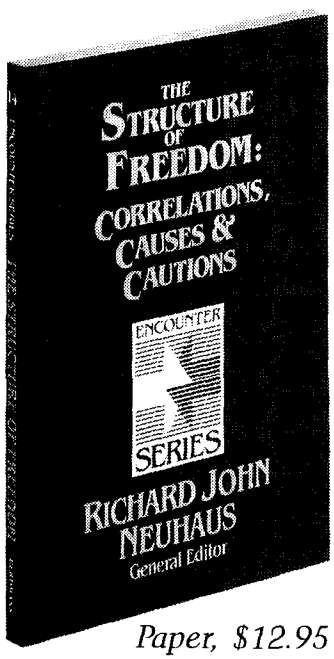

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in the humanities (by my lights) is often naively super-liberal."

Indeed, much of the failure of American education has precisely to do with the humanities, and hence with the role of culture in society. What does it mean to society that the humanities have been debased? This is not a question that can be answered with the conclusion, "Still, we're number one." When the critical thinking fostered by humanities education is neglected, science and technology themselves are put at risk. This conclusion is suggested by Wattenberg's own chart—duly reproduced but not discussed—showing American thirteen-year-olds to stand last in math and science achievement among nine international student groups tested. Presumably, these are the same kids who like school and are the beneficiaries of higher education spending. They are on their way to colleges where anti-humanists, with Wattenberg's blessing, are choosing those whom they regard as the best professors in the world. What East Asian scholars think of science departments, admittedly less affected by this trend, is not necessarily cause for comfort; after all, they value the departments as places to send their own students to train before returning home.

Wattenberg thinks of himself as particularly sensitive to the cultural dimension, notably in his contrast of America's ideational global stretch with the expansionism of the imperial powers in Kennedy's book. "It's culture that counts," he writes in discussing American world influence. He has in mind Coca-Cola, jeans, pop music, and Kojak, all of which he is happy to celebrate so long as they spread American influence. To be sure, a better world order has probably been nurtured by some of the worst elements in American culture. But Wattenberg gives no indication that he sees this as a paradox. Nor does he consider the baleful effects of the same elements at home, where the pop spectacle hardly seems to call for unrestrained boosterism, but rather for some nuanced cultural analysis.

THAT WATTENBERG reads and understands such cultural analysis is clear from his respectful references to social critics less optimistic than himself. One might even argue that his concessions to other critics add up to an indictment of American society and culture more severe than most pessimists would hazard. We face "formidable problems," he concedes, among them crime, drugs, and quotas. "We need environmental spending, federal health research, highway spending, monetary aid to the poor." In deference to Charles Murray, it is conceded that "there are massive problems among some young blacks these days": "high crime, poor education and out-of-wedlock birth" (elsewhere played down as a serious problem), "permissiveness, quotas, criminal coddling, welfare laxness."

In education, for example, he acknowledges that many high school graduates cannot write coherently and that, "ironically, higher [college] enrollment levels can harm quality." Even the kids who like school "do feel that there are big problems among our youngsters": "more than half the teenagers observed 'a lot' of smoking (52 percent), drinking (37 percent), sexual activity (30 percent), crime (19 percent), drug abuse (19 percent), marijuana (23 percent), teenage pregnancy (13 percent), crack/cocaine use (6 percent)." It all adds up to . . . well, to something more complex than Wattenberg's cheery conclusion that regarding education the "good news is that people are paying attention to the bad news."

But for all the minor contradictions and inconsistencies in his evaluation of the state of the nation, Ben Wattenberg offers a valuable witness in an age when commentators, unlike the general public, routinely predict shipwreck for the American ship of state without taking into account the accident-prevention equipment on board. Wattenberg's record on most issues has been good—with the notable exceptions of fertility (which did not continue its decline as he predicted) and Iraq, which proved not to have been "weakened immeasurably." On the more subtle cultural issues, his concessions show that he recognizes the persistence of specific problems, even if he does not integrate those concessions into his overall assessment. Those looking for an analysis that takes national shortcomings more seriously will have to go elsewhere—and be willing to be far less entertained than by the vigorous, confident prose of *The First Universal Nation.*

The God of the Philosophers

TRUTH IN RELIGION: THE PLURALITY OF RELIGIONS AND THE UNITY OF TRUTH. By MORTIMER J. ADLER. *MacMillan. 162 pp. $18.95.*

Reviewed by **Douglas Groothuis**

FOR MANY MODERNS, "truth in religion" means little more than what is deemed important for the psychological and communal needs of individuals or religious communities. Religion is understood as a personal and private endeavor that is best left in the murky zone of "religious preference"—that opaque area of our mental lives where drives, desires, and dispositions combine to produce an essentially arbitrary selection of sacred symbols, rituals, and beliefs. Since we are free to attend "the church (or synagogue) of our choice," that choice is likewise deemed free from rational scrutiny. Simply put, religion is a matter of taste. To think otherwise is illiberal, intolerant, dogmatic, and provincial—all mortal sins against modernity.

Mortimer Adler, incorrigible phi-

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losopher that he is, isn't afraid to sin against modernity, so long as he doesn't sin against logic. (This should be more than evident given that he has written a *philosophical*—not oracular—book on angels called *The Angels and Us* [1982].) For this Aristotelian, the laws of logic—whether brought to bear on ethics, science, religion, or anything else—are inviolable and not subject to popular opinion. Some things are indisputably matters of taste, such as cuisine and fashion, and are relative to individuals and cultures. Yet other matters, such as certain political judgments, are not matters of taste, but are issues over which rational people do disagree in good conscience. In these matters, tolerance is advisable, and a pluralism of perspectives is laudable. But these two categories do not exhaust the moral and intellectual universe. Adler defends the existence of transcultural truths. *Truth in Religion* is essentially an argument that religion must be subjected to the demands of reason if it is to mean anything more than arbitrary opinion, if it is to make transcultural affirmations. To make his case, Adler argues several points.

FIRST, HE BUCKS the tide of myriad anthropologists, sociologists, mythologists, and scholars of religion by claiming that religions are more than cultural or psychological manifestations best explained without reference to metaphysics. Religions make truth claims; they proffer propositions about the nature of reality itself—God, the gods, nature, humanity, ethics, and salvation. These beliefs may have a richly textured history and may be well integrated into social and personal life, but their significance is not exhausted thereby. Religions involve the irreducibly credal "I believe . . ." Adler recognizes that religions not known for developed doctrines—such as Confucianism and Shintoism—nevertheless implicitly express cognitive claims by virtue of their religious practices. They are "credal . . . in the affirmative or negative beliefs about matters of fact that their precepts, prescriptions, or rules of conduct presuppose."

Second, an honest look at the world's religions, Adler argues, will reveal logically incompatible truth claims concerning what religions describe (theology, cosmology, anthropology) as well as what they prescribe (ethics and the way of salvation). A nontheistic or cosmological religion such as Taoism cannot logically be harmonized with the resolutely theological religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Tao is not the Logos; neither is Brahma also known as Allah. The unity of truth does not allow mutually exclusive truth claims to dwell in cognitive communion.

Giving this orientation, Adler has little patience with the syncretism of Hans Küng's *Theology for the Third Millennium* (1988) and Harvey Cox's *Many Mansions* (1988) which, he believes, violates the unity of truth. He even takes Cox to task for faulty exegesis in interpreting Jesus' statement about God's "many mansions" (John 14) as a reference to various world religions. Adler notes that in context the "many mansions" refers to a heavenly abode for followers of Jesus, not a diversity of present religions. (Here the octogenarian philosopher displays more exegetical acumen than the theologian.) Küng errs by falsely equating truth with the moral conduct within religions, asserting that a religion is more or less true by virtue of the way of life it engenders. While Adler thinks that truth may be tested pragmatically, he criticizes Küng for making "the mistake [of thinking] that the pragmatic method of testing whether a given proposition is correctly judged to be true or false eliminates the definition of truth as the agreement of the mind with reality."

Third, Adler rejects a recurrent but fallacious doctrine which exempts religious claims from logical evaluation while affirming their meaningfulness. Adler finds the

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roots of this in Averroes, the Arabic philosopher who argued that a proposition may be "true" for religion but "false" for philosophy or science. Following Aquinas, Adler argues that this "double-truth" theory offends the unity of truth itself. "There is only one all-embracing sphere of logical or factual truth, in which all the parts, however various and diverse they may be in other respects, must be coherent and compatible with one another."

Adler is reasonably successful in defending and applying these main points. Although he moves quickly through the material and considers little of the recent scholarly literature in the philosophy of religion, his essential framework for analysis is a challenging alternative to various noncognitive interpretations of religion.

NEVERTHELESS, CONSERVATIVE Christians and Jews will take issue with how Adler applies his notion of the unity of truth to certain biblical passages. He is quick to identify Adam and Eve, the serpent, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the journey of the wise men to visit Jesus as "mythological" because these accounts do not comport with modern opinion. The Bible, he suggests, is best demythologized so that the unity of truth may be retained. Adler even invokes exegetical principles from Augustine to justify interpretations that would likely have scandalized the Bishop of Hippo.

This move is reminiscent of Peter Berger's observations concerning the dangers of cognitive bartering with modernity. Traditionally held beliefs are relinquished in order that other core beliefs can be preserved. As Berger puts it in *Facing Up to Modernity* (1977): "We'll give you the Virgin Birth, but we'll keep the Resurrection. You can have the Jesus of history, but we'll hold on to the Christ of the apostolic faith." But beliefs once bartered away by Christians in the face of an accusing modernity have often reasserted their cognitive muscle. For instance, Middle Eastern archaeology has repeatedly confounded critics of the historicity of the Old Testament, and Wolfhart Pannenberg has successfully led a scholarly assault on the anti-supernaturalism of critics who deny the resurrection of Jesus in space-time history.

Adler seems too ready to side with "science"—the term itself is an amorphous generalization—against religion with respect to certain truth claims. We should remember his statement from *Ten Philosophical Mistakes* (1985) that "in the history of science even the most revered formulations have been subject to change and correction." As Dean Inge said, "He who marries the spirit of the age is soon a widower."

Furthermore, Adler fails to realize that his style of demythologizing injures the overall integrity of a religious system. If it can be plausibly argued that an author in Scripture intended to assert a literal truth that "science" now denies, demythologizing the passage does not save face theologically. Instead, it leads to the conclusion that the author was incorrect in a factual claim. An alternative approach, where appropriate, is to argue that the inherent literary features of a passage indicate that its author did not intend the passage to be taken literally. This seems more faithful to Augustine than Adler's treatment.

ALTHOUGH ADLER makes the case for *bona fide* truth claims within religions, he says that the purported truths are entirely beyond the reach of normal proof or positive verification, though the claims may be falsified by science or philosophy. Adherence to these claims, then, involves what Adler calls a leap of faith. Even if the existence of God can be shown to be rationally credible (as Adler argued in *How to Think About God* [1980]), the "God of the philosophers" falls short of being an object of religious veneration. Reason takes one only so far on the path to faith.

Adler's approach highlights the distinction between natural and revealed theology. If all religious truth claims could be established by reason alone, there would be no need for revelation, and apologetics would put dogmatics out of business. Pascal astutely noted in his *Pensées* that "if we submit everything to the test of reason, our faith will be left with nothing mysterious or supernatural about it. If it shocks the principles of reason, our faith will be absurd and ridiculous."

Despite Adler's insistence on the propositional character of religious claims, his understanding of religious faith sometimes seems fideistic, as when he speaks of "the leap of faith" (Kierkegaard's locution). One may, after all, take a *step* of faith—induced through reasoning—without leaping into the dark. At the crucial areas where religious truth claims overlap with historical, scientific, and philosophical concerns, religious claims can be rationally discussed by means amenable to those disciplines. There may be no scientific evidence for the Trinity, but a philosopher can argue for its logical coherence or incoherence given the canons of logic. Various claims of the historically oriented religions—such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are subject to corroboration or falsification through historical inquiry. Of course, one may be persuaded through historical evidence that, for example, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified under Pontius Pilate, yet deny the event any redemptive significance. But *positive* evidence is relevant at key points to historically conditioned claims.

Finally, there is one dimension of evidence for religious truth that Adler ignores entirely, because he would deem it merely subjective—that is, religious experience. Interesting *arguments* (not just autobiographical instances) concerning religious experience have been marshaled for centuries and remain in scholarly currency. If individuals from differing backgrounds, temperaments, and situations report similar religious experiences

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within a given tradition, this can provide evidence for their veracity—so long as the experiences are veridical and the reports stemming from them are not logically contradictory or unintelligible.

Despite these criticisms, Adler's insistence on the objectivity of knowledge, the indispensability of reason, and the cognitive content of religious claims is a bracing tonic in an age of sentimental syncretism and irrational religion. Adler clearly develops the logic of truth and applies it to the claims of world religions in programmatic fashion. Rather than reaching any conclusions about the truth or falsity of particular religions, he lays out the logical guidelines within which religious dialogue, discussion, and debate can profitably take place. For this anti-modern prolegomenon, we should be grateful.

Evangelicals and Politics

THE SCATTERED VOICE: CHRISTIANS AT ODDS IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE. By JAMES W. SKILLEN. *Zondervan. 225 pp.*

Reviewed by **Dean C. Curry**

IN THE MINDS of many people, American evangelicalism is closely identified with right-wing politics. In reality, the political beliefs of American evangelicals are far more varied than is evident from watching last night's broadcast of Pat Robertson's 700 Club or from reading about yesterday's anti-abortion protest by Operation Rescue. The politics of American evangelicals are a mixed bag, reflecting many of the same ideological and cultural divisions that characterize American politics in general.

In the title of his new book, *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square,* evangelical theologian and activist James W. Skillen points to the political differences that divide American evangelicals. These differences are important, extending beyond the realm of specific political issues like funding for the arts or defense spending. The scattered political voice of American evangelicalism reflects a deeper struggle among contemporary evangelicals to define the essence of their putatively distinctive politics and, by extension, the essence of their distinctive faith. James Skillen's latest book is not explicitly concerned with the crisis of identity within evangelical theology; nevertheless, his discussion of the many-sided nature of evangelical politics implicitly addresses the theological uncertainties that presently confront American evangelicalism.

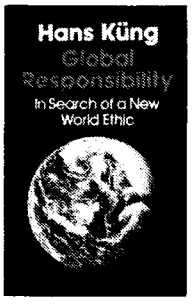
The bulk of *The Scattered Voice* is an informative overview of the contending political perspectives of American evangelicals. In his reading of the contemporary scene, Skillen catalogs seven positions embraced by evangelicals. With the perceptive eye of one who intimately knows this subculture, Skillen is sensitive to the nuances found among evangelicals involved in the public square.

Skillen begins by discussing those evangelicals best known for their political agenda, the "pro-American conservatives." This first voice includes religious television personalities such as Pat Robertson, D. James Kennedy, and the reigning superstar of evangelical media ministries, Dr. James Dobson, a Colorado-based psychologist. While these individuals provide easy targets for the secular media, Skillen expresses sympathy for their call for moral recovery. Skillen also argues, however, that these "pro-American" Christians have not clearly spelled out the normative responsibilities of government in a pluralistic, or what Skillen calls a "differentiated," society. "The appeal of the pro-Americans," writes Skillen, "is not so much for political action as for moral renewal, for individual recommitment to the American faith." Consequently, Skillen concludes, these evangelicals lack "a solid, political program around a political perspective that is grounded in biblical revelation."

THE METHOD and tone of this chapter is illustrative of Skillen's discussion of all seven political voices. He defines the distinguishing characteristics of each position, identifies those aspects that need affirming, and then offers a critical assessment in terms of discovering what he calls "the contours of a Christian political perspective." This method is informative and helpful, especially to those not familiar with the subtleties of the evangelical world. Of particular note is the attention that Skillen gives to the "cautious and critical conservatives," the "pro-justice activists," and the "theonomic reconstructionists." While not nearly as familiar as the pro-

DEAN C. CURRY *is the author of* A World Without Tyranny: Christian Faith and International Politics.

"No survival without a world ethic!"
—Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility*



In ***Global Responsibility*** Küng poses some of his boldest, most provocative ideas yet. He asks: "What would it mean if all the representatives of the major religions ceased to stir up wars, and began to encourage reconciliation and peace between peoples? What would it mean if demands for social justice and the preservation of creation were supported with full moral power?"

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American conservatives, these three voices are major influences within contemporary evangelicalism.

As presented by Skillen, the "cautious and critical conservatives" include Charles Colson, Wheaton College political scientist Mark Amstutz, writer Kenneth Myers, and Cato fellow Doug Bandow. The common denominator among these evangelical heirs of the tradition of Augustine and Niebuhr is their commitment to forging a public philosophy that is rooted in an awareness of the ubiquitous nature of sin and that takes into account the ambiguities of history and moral reasoning. On balance, these evangelical voices are appreciative of democratic capitalism and the role the United States has played in nurturing the democratic ideal around the world.

The "pro-justice activists," on the other hand, generally assume an adversarial posture toward both democratic capitalism and the United States. Representatives of the pro-justice activists include Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners* magazine, and Ronald J. Sider, the driving force behind Evangelicals for Social Action, an organization active on many evangelical college and seminary campuses. These activists, writes Skillen, receive "much of their inspiration from the prophetic tradition of the Bible. Justice, for them, is more important than the American way of life. . . ." For them, a Christian public philosophy is necessarily radical, insisting that Christians stand against all the "principalities and powers" of this world. In practical terms, Christians must oppose—in Wallis' words—"the fundamental values and the basic framework of the American system of economics and politics."

The perspective of Wallis and Sider, as well as that of the "cautious and critical conservatives," represents a minority view within the whole of American evangelicalism. Nevertheless, both views are influential among younger, better-educated evangelicals, and—for all their differences from each other—they may together have a major impact on the coming evangelical generation's understanding of politics and evangelical political responsibility.

ANOTHER VOICE growing in importance among evangelicals is that of "Theonomic Reconstruction." Writes Skillen, "The names of Rousas John Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, Gary North . . . and Joseph Morecraft may not be familiar to most Americans . . . but the growing influence of these men . . . may make them a force to be reckoned with in the 1990s and beyond." This group of renegade evangelicals certainly represents one of the more interesting religious phenomena of recent years, as much for the eccentric personalities involved as for the ideas they hold. The "theonomic reconstructionists" get their name from their belief that Christians should seek to reconstruct society according to the laws and sanctions spelled out in the Old Testament.

Skillen notes an important connection between these "theonomic reconstructionists" and "pro-American conservatives." "The element of sympathy that many reconstructionists feel for pro-American conservatives," he writes, "flows from their belief that the early American political system . . . conformed to some degree to biblical standards." The intellectual centers of theonomic reconstruction remain confined to obscure organizations such as Rushdoony's Chalcedon Foundation and North's Institute for Christian Economics. Nevertheless, chunks of Christian theonomic thinking are finding their way into the mainstream evangelical subculture via personalities like Pat Robertson.

Skillen is rightly critical of the reconstructionist hermeneutic that confuses God's chosen nation, Israel, with the modern state. Indeed, Skillen is critical—also correctly, I believe—of much of evangelical political thinking. For example, Skillen insists that evangelicals need to be more discerning and intellectually rigorous about such things as governmental obligations and the nature of political action. Moreover, Skillen appropriately calls attention to the fact that many evangelicals have not thought carefully about the implications of our differentiated society for the way we think about and do politics.

BUT SKILLEN'S overarching purpose is not simply to critique current evangelical positions, but to articulate the basic elements of a Christian political perspective. Such a perspective will, for one thing, draw upon biblical revelation and Judeo-Christian tradition for insights about such things as the nature of man and the meaning of history. Put differently, a Christian political perspective presents a framework for moral and political reasoning that is informed and/or reinforced by biblical teaching and tradition.

The major flaw in much of contemporary evangelical political thinking is the altogether different assumption that a biblically informed politics will yield a distinctively Christian politics, some sort of "third way" clearly different from present alternatives. This is the common element among otherwise disparate evangelical political voices such as the "theonomic reconstructionists," "pro-justice activists," and many "pro-American conservatives." The problem, however, is that there is no uniquely Christian politics. To cite a recent example, the Bible is entirely silent regarding whether or not sanctions would have been sufficient to force Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. This, like most of politics, is a prudential issue, not a theological one.

One suspects that James Skillen would agree. Nevertheless, Skillen himself comes precariously close to arguing for a Christian politics that is *sui generis*. The centerpiece of Skillen's Christian politics is the theme of public justice. "We should seek diligently to recover a common voice for justice," he concludes. "We ought to emulate Job and put on the clothing of righteousness,

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the robes of public justice."

Who would disagree? But what does this mean in the context of specific public policy issues? It is at this juncture that Skillen's otherwise informative and thoughtful book stumbles, and it is on this point that evangelical political thinking requires careful meditation.

Not the Catholic Moment?

THE CHURCH, PILGRIM OF CENTURIES. By THOMAS MOLNAR. *Eerdmans. 182 pp. $15.95 paper.*

Reviewed by **Kenneth Craycraft**

PERHAPS of all world religions, and certainly of all branches of Christianity, the institution of Roman Catholicism is the one on which the most social reflection has historically focused. And for good reason: as the largest single religious institution in the world, the Catholic Church affects nearly everyone, whether Catholic or not. In *The Church, Pilgrim of Centuries,* Catholic philosopher Thomas Molnar adds to this body of reflection with a rather bleak examination of the present state and future promise of Catholicism as a social institution.

Molnar is well known as a consistent critic of the modern political project. In this volume, he applies his doubts about modernity in general—specifically democracy and liberalism—to an analysis of the problems of the Catholic Church, especially in America. From the outset, Molnar leaves no doubt about where he stands: the church is in big trouble, and there is little hope that it can escape the present morass to regain the glory of a rich and profound history. "Today . . . the church is battered," he says, "not unlike some ex-great powers which, although on the victorious side of the war . . . are now exhausted, without a former energy, self-assurance, and the dynamism of expansion."

Molnar is also clear that the beginning of the institutional malaise of the Catholic Church can be precisely dated: 1965, the end of the Second Vatican Council. "What followed 1965 was not peace after a healthy and cleansing storm, but a landscape of devastation." Since then, he thinks, the Catholic Church has become more and more like the mainline Protestant churches—bereft of its spiritual energy and moral integrity—and is therefore, again like mainline Protestantism, losing its role as a framer and guardian of public morality.

Implicit in Molnar's analysis of what has led to this decline is a two-stage process of democratization. First, the onset of modern liberal democracy moved the church from the center of moral discourse to the periphery. Modern civil society—a direct result of the invention of the separate client state—has led to the "reduction of the role of the church . . . from being the traditional spiritual guide of national communities . . . to the status of an interest group within a society." Rather than being *the* moral compass by which political society directs itself, the church in a liberal democracy has become one of many interest groups competing for the same space in the public square. The church has no more natural role in public moral discourse than the National Organization for Women, ACT-UP, or the United Steel Workers. The state itself, thinks Molnar, "assumes the role of 'church,' or at least adheres to an ideology which for all intents and purposes has become a substitute religion."

THE SECOND STAGE is the process by which the church has tried to dress itself in the proper democratic garb in order to maintain some voice in

KENNETH CRAYCRAFT *is a research associate at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.*

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public discourse. The church has seen fit to prove its liberal and democratic credentials so that it be allowed to have a voice in a liberal and democratic society. "The liberal program," Molnar explains, "now nearly universal in the Western world, has an agenda for the church different from its traditional role and mission." Modern civil society has a triple ideology, he continues: "The adjusting institution is expected to become *democratic* in mentality and structure; *pluralist* in its acceptance of other institutions, groups, and movements as equals; and *ecumenical* in its reformulation of its vocation." Liberal democratic civil society *demands* that an institution meet these criteria, or it need not apply for a place in the public square.

But by making these adjustments in order to avoid marginalization, the church actually contributes to its further marginalization, and possibly, thinks Molnar, its eventual political irrelevance. The first mistake was for the church even to accept the terms of liberal democracy as the *politicus receptus* for the modern world. The second was to embrace these terms for its own ecclesial polity. By becoming more and more democratic (and allegedly more attractive to a democratic society), the church gives up more and more of its natural authority as a moral guide for this same society. The church relativizes (and "relevantizes") itself into irrelevance.

Molnar's book centers on two options advocated by various voices within the church, neither of which is acceptable. Option A is a deliberate and explicit continuation of the democratization that has already taken place implicitly. This is a program in which the church not only concedes that it must find a way to exist in a liberal democratic regime, but actually becomes an apologist for the regime. Option A, rather than finding ways for the church to combat the corrosive elements of modern civil society, contributes to them by giving them theological sanction. In this view, democracy is not the worst regime except for every other; it is rather the result of divine providence, God's own plan for civil society. Whether advocates of Option A intend it or not, Molnar contends, this course will inevitably lead only to further intolerance on the part of pluralist democracies toward those institutions that are not pluralist and democratic, as a healthy Catholic Church cannot be.

Option B, according to Molnar, "is accommodation with socialism and the left." This is the option of liberation theology, which thinks that "religion and socialism remain linked." Molnar does not see the recent collapse of Marxist regimes around the world as invalidating Option B for those committed to it. "In fact," he explains, "as enthusiasm for the Marxist solution is waning world-wide, they may be the rearguard Marxists, and as such may be as fanaticized and intolerant as the Marxist vanguard used to be." As with Option A, Option B is a result of the church replacing its true vision with one supplied by the political and civil culture. "The consequence is practically the same: the church's exclusion from the political realm."

MOLNAR'S CRITICISM of modern civil society and the church's reaction to it is always illuminating and at times profound:

> Since liberalism is basically nominalistic, it denies the genuine ensembles, corporations, institutions, states, nations, and churches. Thus there is no philosophical contradiction when liberal society turns into its opposite, the egalitarian society, where no authority but only brutal force may prevail.

Further, Molnar seems to be on target when he warns of the difficulty of living in liberal political culture and not being affected by "liberal ideology."

> What happened between the middle of the last century and the middle of this one is that liberalism has become a social orthodoxy and the entire apparatus of modern society has come to be seen as the embodiment of an unquestioned truth, a cultural final word concerning the individual and the public weal.

This liberal ideology, he continues, "acts as a dissolver of the religious worldview and practice." Liberalism "with its indirect and multiple pressures . . . instills religious indifference in the population." And he warns Catholics who would embrace liberal democracy with enthusiasm: "The church cannot become 'liberal' and dissolve authority, institutions, structures, and discipline. Their absence or even weakness threatens the souls Christ entrusted to the church."

Now, no one can deny that as the church accommodates itself to liberal culture it is always in danger of losing its true freedom—the freedom "to set forth the Gospel's teaching, guard its integrity, and thereby protect the faith of the people of God" (*Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*). But on at least one major point, some of Molnar's conclusions are a bit problematic. He is careful to note that it is unthinkable that the church should somehow become extinct, but he makes statements that might suggest that he is denying Christ's promise to the church that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Talk of the church becoming "irrelevant" sounds too much like the church finally succumbing completely to the weight of modernity. There is much to make a Catholic weary as he surveys the American landscape, but the promise remains, and it is one that should offer us hope. The promise of Christ is that the church will always be the protector of orthodoxy—despite the many voices of dissent that are heard within it. As long as this is true, the church will not be irrelevant to the one question that has disturbed mankind throughout history, and the question to which the church has the only relevant answer: how must I be saved?

NOR IS IT even correct to say that the church is irrelevant in public moral debate, Molnar's main concern. The

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fact that abortion is even a moral question some eighteen years after *Roe v. Wade* must be attributed to the strong, consistent voice of the church's magisterium. And who really thinks that such issues as school-dispensed contraception, pornography, and sexual "liberty" would be the hot issues they are were it not for the highly structured and organized voice of the Catholic Church?

In this connection, Molnar takes issue with Richard John Neuhaus, to whom he attributes the notion that this era is the "Catholic moment," that the Catholic Church is beginning a new formation of public morality in America. Molnar says that this is patently false, and were this actually Neuhaus' position, he would be correct. But this happens not to be Neuhaus' position, at least as put forward in *The Catholic Moment*, where he, too, expresses some of Molnar's pessimism. Indeed, Neuhaus' critique of the church in liberal and democratic society is usually as insightful and occasionally even as alarmed as Molnar's. Neuhaus' "Catholic moment" is highly qualified, and he acknowledges that the moment may be missed.

Molnar's political insight is keen, but Neuhaus' ecclesiology is better. The latter stands consciously on the promise that Christ gave His church, and it looks for the church's continued march through history as the mystical body of Christ. Because of the kind of institution the Catholic Church is, it just might—unlike all other institutions—be the instrumentality for the creation of a rigorous public and political morality. Its rich history of moral and political thought, its highly developed institutional structure, its sheer size, and the zeal of many of its adherents make the Catholic Church (*pace* Mr. Lincoln) "the world's last best hope." This does not mean, says Neuhaus, that it necessarily will make a sweeping change in the moral practices of Americans, but no other institution can even be considered a candidate. Molnar thinks it impossible that even the Catholic Church can pull this off, and on this point he goes too far.

Regardless of how gloomy the picture looks from an orthodox Catholic perspective, the church has always weathered every storm and will continue to do so. It may not have the political relevance Molnar would like to see, and that is to be mourned. But the teaching of Christ and the Apostles is not primarily concerned with that kind of relevance. As Tom Bethell wrote recently in the *Wall Street Journal*, we might see a smaller church in years ahead, but if that happens we will certainly see one that is more sure of itself and its mission—to protect the gospel of Christ. One wishes that the entire tone of Molnar's book would have been more consistent with the last paragraph of his Introduction:

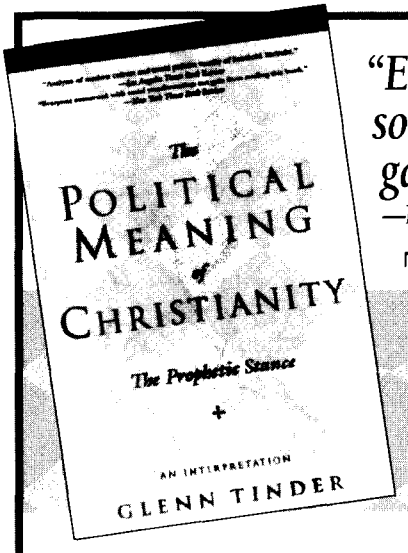
> Optimism is not in order, for we do not even know whether we have reached the low point of this revolution. It seems, however, that faith and orthodoxy possess a resilience that utopia-fuelled radicalism lacks. It also seems that sacred history obstinately accompanies profane history and comes to its rescue.

The Church, Pilgrim of Centuries is a worthy assessment of why, at least at the present, this truth is difficult to see.

BRIEFLY NOTED

THEONOMY: A REFORMED CRITIQUE. Edited by WILLIAM S. BARKER and W. ROBERT GODFREY. *Zondervan. 413 pp. $15.95 paper.*

CERTAINLY ONE OF the more interesting religious stories of recent years has been the attraction of growing numbers of evangelical Christians to a variation of Reformed theology



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known as "Christian Reconstruction." Christian Reconstruction, also called theonomy or dominion theology, teaches—among other things—that the moral and judicial laws of the Old Testament remain normative for the modern state. This volume, a collection of essays written by faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary, is arguably the best and most serious critique of Christian Reconstruction to date. A common theme of the book's five parts is that theonomy represents a distortion of the Calvinistic heritage. Most of the chapters, which are unusually even in their quality, address one or another theological dimension of theonomy, such as the relation of the law to the gospel, and what the editors call "triumphalist dangers." The book also contains several essays that are not heavily theological in substance. Of special note are co-editor W. Robert Godfrey's discussion of Calvin's natural law orientation, Samuel Logan's engrossing discussion of the Puritan understanding of the state, and John Muether's first-rate analysis of why theonomy is thriving. While *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* may not be the place to start for someone totally unfamiliar with Christian Reconstruction, there is, for the already initiated, no better volume.

—*Dean C. Curry*

BREAKING WITH COMMUNISM: THE INTELLECTUAL ODYSSEY OF BERTRAM D. WOLFE. Edited by ROBERT HESSEN. *Hoover Institution Press. 311 pp. $24.95 cloth, $18.95 paper.*

Bertram Wolfe (1896-1977), the American historian and journalist, was a Communist in his youth, but later broke with the Party. He then devoted a long and distinguished career to exposing and combatting Communist totalitarianism generally and Soviet Communism in particular. His most famous work, *Three Who Made a Revolution* (1948)—a triple biography of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin—remains a classic work in its field. Wolfe's autobiography, *A Life in Two Centuries*, covers only the years up until 1938; he died before completing a second volume. This book follows Wolfe's story to the end, tracing the evolution of his thought through unpublished letters, speeches, and writings. The Introduction, by editor Robert Hessen of the Hoover Institution, provides valuable context and perspective on this fascinating figure.

THE CAPITALIST SPIRIT: TOWARD A RELIGIOUS ETHIC OF WEALTH CREATION. Edited by PETER L. BERGER. *Institute for Contemporary Studies. 191 pp. $18.95.*

The editor and most of the cast of authors are familiar to readers of this journal: Robert M. Grant, David Novak, Michael Novak, George Weigel, Walter Block, and Richard John Neuhaus. The purpose of the essays is nicely caught in the title and subtitle. There are no doubt those who would think it immodest for us to tell you how well the essays achieve their purpose.

LIVING THE TRUTH. By JOSEF PIEPER. *Ignatius. 190 pp. $11.95 paper.*

"A wise man is one who savors all things as they really are," said Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153). We don't know whether the publisher or the author decided to have that epigram on the cover, but it fits quite perfectly the argument set forth by the renowned Thomist, Josef Pieper. The present edition combines two essays, "The Truth of All Things" and "Reality and the Good." These essays, both originally published almost thirty years ago, have opened for thousands of readers the way to "ethical realism" as construed in Thomist thought. Pieper quotes, and thoroughly agrees with, the mature Goethe, who observed that "every epoch which is in the process of retrogression and disintegration is subjective, but all progressive epochs have an objective trend." In our time, the dominant trend, especially in moral thought, is toward the subjective, and usually not in the more elevated Kantian form criticized by Pieper. Ignatius Press of San Francisco renders a real service by making available in this form two of the many important contributions of Josef Pieper.

PAUL AND THE LEGACIES OF PAUL. Edited by WILLIAM S. BABCOCK. *Southern Methodist University Press. 426 pp. $32.50 cloth, $16.95 paper.*

Twelve essays by leading patristic scholars, with comments by yet others, providing a useful overview of the state of scholarship on Paul and the early church. Two might be of particular interest to the readers of this journal. Adolf Martin Ritter examines John Chrysostom's understanding of Paul as recommending a kind of "social utopia" centered not in the state but in the church. Robert Wilken, a frequent contributor to this journal, contends that the Pauline view of the sovereign will of God in, for example, Romans 9 is often viewed as teaching a kind of determinism but is in fact the essential break from the Greco-Roman determinism of natural forces.

CHURCH: THE HUMAN STORY OF GOD. By EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX. *Crossroad. 263 pp. $22.95.*

The noted Dutch theologian lashes out at what he believes to be the betrayal of Vatican Council II and its understanding of a church that is constituted by the tasks of history. The subtitle of the Dutch edition is more accurately translated as "Human Beings as the Story of God." The argument of the book might yet more accurately be stated as "Human Beings as God." At one point (p. 236), Schillebeeckx quotes Genesis 1:26 as "Let us make God in our own image." There is no indication that this is a typo, and it is perfectly consonant with his contention that "God's divine life" is contingent upon our ability to cope with questions such as environmental degradation, nuclear warfare, unjust distribution of wealth, struggles of self-liberation, and so forth.

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"The church only has a future," the author writes, "to the degree to which it lets go of all supernaturalism and dualism." For Father Schillebeeckx, it appears, supernaturalism means transcendence and dualism means the difference between God and man. The dustjacket claims that this is theology in "a completely novel framework." It seemed novel to many people when it was advanced, although by no means for the first time, by Ludwig Feuerbach (d. 1872). *Church* is a very angry, very dated, and very sad book.

At the Concert

There!
He's one of the first onstage!
A less disheveled crowd than usual . . .
Under those lights he probably can't see us.
His son took his place on the top row of risers.
. . . sheepishly enduring the scattered applause
until the other choristers had filed on.
The conductor is grey-haired.
A gentleman.
No tuning of instruments; just a pitch.
A pose — he raised his arms
And they their expectations . . .
Minor chords. Latin language.
The conductor was merely the pulse of a larger hand
That gestured grandly toward a panorama.
Agricola, agricolae . . .
a, e, i, o, u,
Vowels uncomplicated by later centuries . . .

". . . etiam pro nobis . . ."

"pro nobis"? . . . pro forma . . . pro bono . . .
ablative, anyhow.
They sang the bitter-sweet polyphony by heart,
Their adolescent voices plaintive, yet composed.
Whence this solemnity?
The darkened hall, the measured phrases . . .
The bright young faces, swaying gently
Above the robes of dark maroon . . .
They were like tiers of votive lamps
Whose glow suffused the vaulted heights.
Did he admire more the music, or the man
who could command his son's unflinching regard
and could withstand it?
For a moment he was again the Child,
intently placing wooden blocks,
while she watched, immobile, wondering,
"What shall the pattern be?"

". . .in saecula saeculorum."

Michael J. Miller

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Richard John Neuhaus

The Public Square

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Pop Goes the Culture

We made a mistake in a recent public symposium by saying, in response to a question, that we had not listened to enough rock music to have an intelligent opinion about it. A journalist reporting on the meeting cited this as evidence certain that this writer is entirely out of touch with the culture of which he presumes to be a critic. There is something to that, at least when it comes to what is called popular culture. Actually, we do have a rather definite opinion about, for example, heavy metal and related tumults, but at the time we didn't want to get off the subject under discussion, which was not rock music.

As much as one admires Allan Bloom's self-disciplined research in which he apparently submitted himself to hours upon hours of barbaric assault in order to produce his withering critique of rock music in *The Closing of the American Mind,* one need not go to so much trouble in order to have a rather definite opinion. An occasional stop at MTV while flipping through the channels for LOP (Least Objectionable Program) or hearing from time to time the noises issuing from boomboxes carried on the streets of New York is quite enough. Of course we're over fifty and don't expect to persuade young people about the sheer ugly awfulness of these masturbatory excitations set to the thumping accompaniment of antimusic. The rejoinder is that the "older generation" has always deplored the culture of the young, being certain that they are on their way to hades in a handbasket.

There is something to that, too, but not much. This writer's cut-off point with popular music was somewhere around the later Simon and Garfunkel. "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" still sounds good of a nostalgic evening. A piece or two from the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* once a year or two can be fun, even knowing that "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was, it is said, intended to go with drug tripping. But to compare such stuff with today's heavy metal and rap is just silly. "The Yellow Submarine" is as much like the feeble-minded filth of 2 Live Crew as is Bing Crosby's "White Christmas." Yet many parents are easily intimidated by the charge that they have forgotten that they too were once young, that their parents also disapproved of their music, and so forth.

Dyspeptic ruminations about popular culture need no particular excuse, but this one is occasioned by a fine address that Michael Medved delivered at Hillsdale College. Medved, watchers of PBS will know, is co-host of "Sneak Previews." His jeremiad is mainly about movies, but the indictment ranges more broadly. He comments on a 1990 film, *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover.* "This is not a film for the faint-of-heart—or the delicate of stomach. It begins with a scene showing the brutal beating of a naked man while the main character gleefully urinates all over him. It ends with that same character slicing off a piece of a carefully cooked and elegantly prepared human corpse in the most vivid and horrifying scene of cannibalism ever portrayed in motion pictures. In between, we see necrophilia, sex in a toilet, the unspeakably bloody and sadistic mutilation of a nine-year-old boy, another victim smeared with feces, a woman whose cheek is pierced with a fork, and an edifying scene with two naked bodies writhing together ecstatically in the back of a truck filled with rotting, maggot-infested garbage. There is, in short, unrelieved ugliness, horror, and depravity at every turn. Naturally, the critics loved it."

A Deeper Perversity

Medved says that all around us "we see evidence of the rejection of traditional standards of beauty and worth." Well yes, but that seems a bit prosaic. There is a deeper perversity that can only be glimpsed by those who are open to the reality of evil. Consider the obscenity trial of the rap group 2 Live Crew last year. The newspapers that championed their freedom of rap and hailed the promotion of rape as a creative expression of black culture steadfastly refused to publish the group's lyrics, so to speak, in their

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reports on the trial. The jury heard the words, however, and we are told that they giggled nervously. It can't be obscenity, opined one juror afterwards, for he had himself heard such language on the streets. So there.

Medved writes: "One of the expert witnesses who helped secure the group's acquittal was a professor of literature at Duke University, Henry L. Gates. Under oath, mind you, he testified that these poetic souls, whose lyrics exalt anal rape and the mutilation of female genitalia, had created a 'refreshing and astonishing' body of work. Professor Gates went on to compare their achievements to those of Shakespeare, Chaucer, and James Joyce. As George Orwell once commented, 'There are some ideas so preposterous that only an intellectual could believe them.' " We don't know Mr. Gates, but we doubt that he believes what he said in the sense that Medved, and most sensible people, understand "believe." Of course Mr. Gates may be mad. Judging by the departments of literature in some of our distinguished universities, it is obvious that the streets of our large cities are not the only beneficiaries of the deinstitutionalization craze of twenty years ago. More likely Mr. Gates was being "playful" in the chic ironic mode to which cultural criticism is currently enthralled.

Medved is against censoring groups such as 2 Live Crew. He thinks that government efforts to limit the expression of anything at all only turns the villains into celebrities. There is also something to that, although we find considerable merit in Irving Kristol's argument over the years that a society that cannot censor has little of importance that it holds dear. In any event, Medved wants to rely on market forces, consumer boycotts, and the cultivation of small communities of decency. He himself, however, observes that market forces don't seem to be of much help in the movie business. Many of the most egregiously offensive films have failed miserably at the box office while, again and again, those films affirming traditional values, and especially those more sympathetic to religion, have done astonishingly well. Medved offers impressive evidence in support of that observation. The conclusion would seem to be that the moguls and minimoguls of Hollywood are not driven by the buck. They really want to produce really bad stuff. In these worlds, art is, almost by definition, repugnant. (See above on evil.)

The television networks, on the other hand, have to turn a profit. Medved runs through the dismal data on youthful pathologies—thirty times more 14 to 17 year-olds arrested in 1990 than in 1950, a 500 percent increase in out-of-wedlock births since 1960, etc. He thinks these unhappy developments have something to do with sex and violence in the media. Of course media executives insist that there is no demonstrated correlation, never mind causal connection, between what people see and what they do. Medved comments: "This same industry then turns around and asks advertisers to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for thirty seconds of air time in the hope that this fleeting exposure will directly alter the public's buying behavior. Don't they grasp the contradiction here? On the one hand, we're told that an hour of television programming has no real-world consequences, and on the other we're led to believe that sixty-second spots that occasionally interrupt this program are powerful enough to change public perceptions of everything from canned goods to candidates." Clearly, this Medved fellow is limited by left lobe, linear thinking patterns that used to be associated with sanity.

A New Concern with Culture

A few months ago, the Brady Foundation brought together a passel of mainly neoconservative types in Chicago to ponder the shape of struggles ahead. There was a ready, and perhaps remarkable, consensus that the cultural questions—as distinct, albeit not separate, from the economic and political questions—are now center stage. It was further agreed that, at the heart of culture, is religion. Since that is, in brief, the raison d'être of this journal, you can be sure that this writer did not dissent. But there is culture, and then there is culture. The troubling issue of popular culture kept erupting during the three days of deliberation. There were those who insisted that it is not enough to defend or restore high culture in our institutions, especially the universities. They favored direct efforts to influence the lethal lunacy of pop culture.

How that might be done was left unclear, and some thought it should not even be attempted. For example, Samuel Lipman, publisher of *The New Criterion*, a bracingly elitist organ of high culture. "You are dangerously deluded if you think popular culture is a tiger that you can ride," warned Lipman. And indeed it does seem to be a tiger out of control, and a very hungry tiger at that. If enough people heap upon it the contempt, aesthetic and moral, that it so richly deserves, perhaps it can be buried. More positively, the dangers and degradations of pop culture can be exposed by contrast with the arts that are in conversation with human dignity and destiny. But people devoted to restoring our civilizational story are likely to fare poorly in the Gadarene sweepstakes of pop culture.

Michael Medved was not at the Chicago meeting, but his conclusion probably fits the thoughts of many who were. "What matters ultimately in the culture wars is what we do in our daily lives—not the big statements that we broadcast to the world at large, but the small messages we send through our families and our neighborhoods and our communities." That may sound excessively modest,

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so he adds: "And those small messages, reinforcing each other from every direction across this country, can become a force powerful enough to change the world. The future will depend not so much on the movers and shakers in the centers of power, but on the hopes that we generate in our own communities, our schools, our churches, synagogues, and families. What we do there will count for even more, in the long run, than what celluloid shadows do on screen."

Medved is Jewish, but his proposal sounds a lot like that old Sunday School song, "This little gospel light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." And of course that sounds very much like "the thousand points of light." Sophisticates who are disdainful of the thousand points of light don't have a light. They walk in darkness and call it enlightenment. We should not be surprised that their pop epigones are like unto them. (See above on evil.)

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ISLAM IN THE WEST

It has been said, with some exaggeration, that there are more Muslims in the United States than Episcopalians. For reasons that should be obvious, however, nobody suggests that Episcopalians constitute a "minority" requiring special treatment. In truth, there is only the slightest and very occasional mention of Islam as a "minority" of consequence. America is so very large and so very diverse that a million or two more of this group or that—Korean, Mexican, Filipino, whatever—does not seem to make that much difference.

The Muslims in the United States, however, did come in for considerable attention during the war in the Gulf. Also visible in an unprecedented way were various communities of Christians from the Middle East, notably the Chaldeans from Iraq. But interest understandably focused on the Muslims, since the war was depicted, both in the Middle East and by its domestic critics, as a conflict between the Christian West and the world of Islam. One of the arguments against the allied response to Saddam Hussein's aggression was that it would destroy any possibility of understanding between Islam and the West for generations to come. That is at least arguable.

The more immediate prospect, now that the war is over, is that Islam will disappear from the consciousness of most Americans, having had Warhol's prescribed fifteen minutes in the media sun. We hope that will not happen. Muslims are not simply one minority among others. Their presence among us could be an important and positive challenge to the American experience. In this connection, Americans might attend to the cultural impact of Islam in Western Europe.

Unlike Europeans, all Americans, if they care to think about it, belong to a minority of one kind or another. More important, the American reality is based not upon ethnicities or nationalities but upon public propositions. Americans are a people not by virtue of their shared experience of historical "peoplehood" but by tacit agreement to the assertion that "We hold these truths . . ."

An Acute Problem in Europe

It is very different with Europe. Very different. That is where the question of "Islam in the West" is taking on proportions that some Europeans call a crisis. Writing in *The National Interest*, Anthony Hartley notes that British opinion, for instance, is sharply divided over what to do about the growing Muslim presence. It is estimated that there are 1.5 million Muslims in Britain, served by some 600 mosques. Some Muslims are quite militant and are beginning to take a separatist turn. In 1990, they issued "The Muslim Manifesto—a Strategy for Survival." It declared, among other things: "We are an autonomous community, capable of setting our own goals and priorities in domestic and foreign relationships. . . . We are sick and tired of headmasters and teachers discriminating against our children. We are sick and tired of being told to 'free' our women from 'slavery.' Our women will never be available to become sex slaves of the West. Our message to our tormentors is short and simple—get off our backs." Many of the hard questions about Islam in the West were brought to a head by the controversy over Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses,* and Iran's subsequent call for his assassination.

The British, by virtue of historical experience, are a people (actually, three or four peoples) in the sense of being—to use a term no longer in favor—a race. But now the patriotism and imperial glory of "Rule Britannia" has been transmogrified into a threadbare Commonwealth that entitles Muslims from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Africa to British citizenship. Britain has never experienced anything like this before. The separatist vs. integrationist arguments with which Americans are familiar in our own black-white relations press upon core components of "British identity." As Hartley notes, Muslims are understandably anxious about assimilation, about losing their children to a society ordered by what he calls "the norms of Western life." A suggestive phrase, that, and we will come back to it.

Britain is by no means alone in being faced by the challenge of Islam in the West. The Muslim population in France is estimated to be between 2.5 and 3 million. Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and

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others visit themselves upon France in not always fond remembrance of that country's imperial sway. Muslims have successfully challenged the rules of the highly centralized and emphatically secular school system, claiming a right to observe their own codes of dress, sex separation, and even religious teaching. And so it goes through other countries. Germany has almost two million Muslims, mainly doing the menial tasks assigned to "guest workers." In little Belgium there are 200,000 North Africans and Turks; in the Netherlands 285,000 Turks, Moroccans, and Surinamese.

There are ironies involved. For example, Turks in Germany and elsewhere can express the more radical Islamic political views that are suppressed in Turkey itself. Muslims in all these countries sometimes press for a more rigorous morality, in some cases a morality that was once part of "the norms of Western life." "There is," Hartley writes, "deep disquiet among Muslims about sex education in schools, particularly about homosexuality." In Britain, where a more flexible education system allows parents to "opt out" of what Americans call public schools, groups can form their own schools with financial grants from the government. Anglicans, Catholics, and Jews have been doing that all along. Now the Muslims want their own "grant-aided" schools, and some Britons are uneasy about that.

There is the additional worry that Muslim communities in Europe are loyal to and controlled by foreign governments. The Algerians, Saudis, and Iranians figure prominently in this connection. In Britain and France, for instance, the government provides massive funding and controls the appointment of religious teachers. Many Muslims in these countries make no secret of the fact that their primary allegiance is to their countries of origin and continuing support. While in Britain most Muslims can vote and in Germany few can, the problems of Islam as a self-consciously "foreign" presence are similar. Hartley notes that the Rushdie affair sharply divided liberal opinion in Britain. Some who are enthusiastic about Britain becoming a "multicultural" society had second thoughts about a minority culture that does not consider itself to be bound by the rules of the majority. Burning books and sentencing authors to death for "blasphemy" does not fit well into the liberal tradition.

The Challenge to Modern Liberalism

Hartley sees some worrying convergences at work. "Liberals opposed to any restriction on the right to publish find themselves faced with Muslim demands for an extension of that [blasphemy] law to protect Islam from insult. Their reply has been to demand the removal of the blasphemy law from the statute book—but this would hardly satisfy Muslims, even though it would put them on an equal footing with their Christian brethen. Indeed, on this and other issues (including religious education in the schools) there have recently been signs of an incipient alliance between British Muslims and some fundamentalist Christians." Liberals favoring multiculturalism tend to talk about the wonders of diversity (as in "rainbow coalition," "gorgeous mosaic," etc.). However: "Such phenomena as the infliction of the death penalty for apostasy or the social subjection of women were not considered as being 'rich' or 'exciting,' and it came as a shock to find that Islam had to be accepted as a whole."

So what is to be done? "For the host governments in Europe, there is only one course to pursue," Hartley confidently concludes. "European countries will not for long take on a penitential stance about their past imperial dealings with Islam, nor will they forever make allowances for wounded religious sensibilities. The application of law is their only answer to the paradoxes of Muslim expansion and renewal. If the European Muslims get no more and no less than that, they will not have done badly."

Mr. Hartley's is an informative and fair-minded discussion of Islam in the West. But it is in the end deeply unsatisfying and unpersuasive. At the beginning of his discussion, he speaks about "the norms of Western life." At the end, he can speak only about "the application of law." Throughout, he assumes, as do most people who discuss these questions, that the West's liberal tradition of democratic tolerance is a thoroughly secular achievement. Therefore, it finally comes down to secularism vs. Islam's disruption of our habits of tolerance by "dragging" in the religion factor once again. Historically, however, the achievement of democracy and tolerance was in tandem with, not against, religion. The American experience, for instance, owes an immeasurable debt to the struggles of Puritans and others in England for the freedom to give public expression to their conscientious allegiance to an Authority higher than the state. Tolerance is the product of such allegiances in tension. Tolerance, as an end in itself, is vacuous and cannot stand on its own.

Liberal political theory has almost consistently overlooked that fact. When confronted by "the norms of Islam," the liberal response is to appeal first to "the norms of the West," and then to abandon that appeal in favor of the invocation of legal positivism—the law is the law is the law. Positive law is very little, however, if it does not have a believable connection with what is perceived to be morally normative. The appeal to "the norms of the West" is quickly abandoned because secular liberal theory cannot specify what those norms might be, and in many cases rules out such norms in principle. Most of the countries of Europe are far more secularized than is the United States. But there, as here, the content of "the norms of the West" was supplied by what we call the Judeo-Christian or biblical

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tradition. Confronted by the challenge of Islam in the West, the maxim applies: You can't fight something with nothing.

The word "fight" might be offputting, suggesting a revival of wars of religion. Such a revival is not likely to occur, however. The biblical tradition in the West supplies a normative rationale for the tolerance that is required for genuine pluralism. It is wrongheaded to fret about "an incipient alliance between Muslims and fundamentalist Christians." One does not need to be a fundamentalist to recognize that human community requires moral normativity. A Western society that can no longer publicly name "the norms of Western life" is dangerously vulnerable to normative challenges—whether that challenge comes from Islam or from reactionaries who would squelch diversity in the name of their highest good, law and order.

Restating the Case for Democratic Pluralism

The challenge of Islam in the West will almost certainly become more pressing in the years ahead, also in this country. If that challenge takes the shape of religion and moral normativity, on the one hand, against secular liberalism and positive law, on the other, we are in for some very rough times. The more promising response to the challenge is to articulate anew the moral and religious undergirdings of our social experiment in democratic pluralism. A key part of that response is a Jewish and Christian readiness to engage in serious dialogue with Islam. It may be, as some scholars argue, that Islam has no religious resources for morally legitimating a public order that is democratic and pluralistic. That has yet to be explored adequately. What can be said with confidence is that, unless Islam in the West prompts us to recover and rearticulate what is morally normative for our way of life, Islam will be—as many Europeans believe is already the case—a serious threat to that way of life. Whether an increasing and increasingly assertive Muslim minority in America threatens or helps to renew our common life depends chiefly on the response of those who can, with the Founders, persuasively say, "We hold these truths . . . "

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ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN

"Multiculturalism" is the classy word that designates an indiscriminate assault on Western culture. Is that putting it too starkly? Not really. In academe and certain religious worlds, the drive for "inclusivity" and "diversity" is premised upon the claim that there is no normative tradition. Further, the tradition ("canon") that has dominated in the past is exclusive and oppressive. The delicious irony in all this is that the claim that there is no normative tradition is derived from the normative tradition of the West. That is, no other culture known to us insists upon the moral need to be critical of itself and open to other, often hostile, views of the world. In a similar way, it has been argued that secularism is the illegitimate offspring of biblical religion. The biblical insistence upon the reality of reality, the dignity of man, the communication between divine and human reason, the purposefulness of history, and the presence of the transcendent in the immanent (e.g., the doctrine of Incarnation)—all this, taken in a deviant direction, results in secularism's "death of God."

The ironic character of multiculturalism is beautifully caught by Edward Rothstein, writing on multiculturalism and the arts in *The New Republic*: "Multiculturalism is a twisted version of Western teachings, flourishing in the hothouse of a democracy that renders all distinctions suspect and all learning elitist. The multiculturalist is a Western liberal with so large a power of empathy that liberalism itself is dissolved, a rationalist with so transcendental a perspective that reason itself is discarded. The multiculturalist is a universalist without universalism, an artist without a vision of art; a monster child of Western culture; a baleful, unwitting tribute to the tradition he hungers to depose." Try that one out on the next person you come across urging equal time between Zonk Rock and Bach, or between Krishna and Jesus. You say you don't meet such people? Count your blessings. On the other hand, maybe, as we Westerners feel compelled to say, your world is too small.

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MENTIONING THE UNMENTIONABLE

Our parochial newspaper has a longish feature on Dr. Allan Sandage of the Carnegie Institution in Pasadena, California. Sandage is frequently called "the father of modern astronomy," and the article is about the far-out debates among cosmologists about matter and meta-matter. Sandage got on to the question of the limits of science. "Science cannot answer the deepest questions. As soon as you ask why is there something instead of nothing, you have gone beyond science. I find it quite improbable that such order came out of chaos. There has to be some

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organizing principle. God to me is a mystery, but is the explanation for the miracle of existence, why there is something instead of nothing."

The *Times* report continues: "Dr. Sandage, wishing he had never brought up his religious beliefs, stops himself with a quip. 'That's the reason people think my scientific career is over—I reveal myself as much as I do.' " Sandage goes on to say that he keeps his theology separate from "the hard-nosed business of the laboratory." But what does it mean to say that Sandage "brought up his religious beliefs"? In fact, the entire article is about exploring the nature of reality, a question that, it is acknowledged, entails philosophical and metaphysical inquiries that elude laboratory testing. Apparently, neither Dr. Sandage nor the reporter was embarrassed about "religious beliefs" until the G-word was mentioned.

The lesson is that it is alright to talk about God so long as you don't mention God. Ours is not a secular society. Our culture is awash in ultimate beliefs that are maddeningly various and, usually, quite unreflective. It is simply that our cultural elites are typically averse to what they identify as "religion." References to, say, "the X Factor" are admissible. But, of course, biblical believers will continue to name the Name, thus assuring that the language cops patrolling respectable public discourse will continue to be terribly nervous about "bringing up religious beliefs."

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RELIGION IN THE SECULAR UNIVERSITY

It is only a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, but it speaks volumes. In the advertisement, which has appeared a number of times, Columbia University offers seven graduate programs leading to the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (M.A.L.S.). The seven areas are laid out in bold type across the page: AMERICAN STUDIES, ANCIENT STUDIES, EAST ASIAN STUDIES, ISLAMIC STUDIES, JEWISH STUDIES, MEDIEVAL STUDIES, and SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES. The obvious question: Where is CHRISTIAN STUDIES?

In fact, given the size of their constituencies in New York City and the world, one might assume there would be warrant for offering programs in, for instance, Catholic Studies, Eastern Orthodox Studies, Evangelical Protestant Studies, and Liberal Protestant Studies. Surely, one might think, the number of people and levels of presumed interest in all of these would be greater than is the case with Islamic studies. But, for peculiar reasons, perhaps not.

Why no Christian studies? A number of possible answers come readily to mind. Perhaps Columbia assumes that people study what they do not know about and, since this is a Christian culture, everybody already knows about Christianity. If that is their thinking, it is an intriguing assumption worthy of further exploration. Or perhaps, because there are so many different kinds of Christians, Columbia thinks a program in Christian Studies would open a can of worms, with various Christian groups complaining that they are not treated fairly. If that is their thinking, it implies that variations within Islam and Judaism can be safely ignored. In any case, the avoidance of differences that might be "controversial" would seem to be alien to the purposes of a university.

Or perhaps Columbia thinks that the examination of Christianity is included in Medieval Studies. This would imply, among other things, that Christianity is a dead religion of antiquarian interest. In fact, the description given of Medieval Studies would seem to be only obliquely related to Christianity ("Chaucer, Medieval Philosophy, The Crusades, and Medieval Manuscript Illumination.") A fourth possible reason for not offering a program in Christian Studies is that Columbia assumes that such programs are available at other universities and colleges in the region, some of them explicitly Christian. But then, all the areas of study advertised by Columbia—including Chinese religion under East Asian Studies and Hinduism and Buddhism under South Asian—are available also at other institutions, some of which are explicitly Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim. So that can't be the reason for no Christian Studies. Or maybe Columbia thinks that offering Christian Studies would raise some kind of church-state problem. But Columbia is a private university, and the administration could consult its quite reputable law school in order to be relieved of that anxiety.

So why isn't there a program in Christian Studies? Each of the above reasons may be pertinent in part, but the larger reason has to do with the secular ethos of the modern university. Nervousness is caused by the awareness that there are an awful lot of people who really believe in Christianity. The university is a cosmopolitan space where "religious traditions" can be subjected to critical examination but are not to be taught as though they might be, well, you know, *true*. Even in religious studies departments, faculty members who are Hindus, Buddhists, and believers in Mystical Crystals can quite openly profess their faith. Muslims and, usually, Jews can, too. Nobody raises a question about their "proselytizing." Not so with Christians. The fear is that Christianity might be taken altogether too seriously. The absence of Christian Studies in the Columbia program, it turns out, is not an insult to Christianity. Those of other faiths, however, might have reason to be offended.

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WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago gets a bum rap from the far-left *National Catholic Reporter.* The editors rightly note that there was special interest in Bernardin's views on the Gulf War because he was principal author of the 1983 bishops' peace pastoral. As the war was coming to its successful conclusion, Bernardin wrote in his diocesan newspaper that he had very much opposed it at the start. As the ground war was impending he admitted to having "greater doubts about [the war's] long-term implications," yet was "not prepared to state categorically, as some have, that it is unjust or immoral." The editors of *NCR* go on this way: "Why would he not have written: 'It seems a land war is likely, and I begin to have greater doubts about its long-term implications. I am not prepared to state categorically, as some have, that it is just or moral'? Why, we ask, must the burden of proof always fall upon the peacemakers?" Two comments may be in order: In light of what happened in the Gulf, who turned out to be the true peacemakers? Second, the Cardinal's saying that he was not prepared to state categorically that the war was unjust or immoral clearly implies that he was strongly leaning to that view but was not prepared to say so publicly and categorically. Contra the misguided criticism of *NCR*, there would seem to be little doubt that the Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago was on *NCR*'s side in opposing the war. Certainly he refused to say categorically, or even conditionally, that the war was just or moral. Apparently he was in no way even inclined to say that.

■ Waltraut Schoppe, the Minister for Women's Affairs in the German state of Lower Saxony, addressed a church group on why the Six Week War in the Gulf instanced a "patriarchal crisis" in the West. The Lutheran World Federation deemed her analysis worthy of global distribution. Minister Schoppe opined that there would have been no war if women had been able to make the decision. It is a well-known fact, she said, that American fighter pilots "particularly like watching pornographic videos" before going into action, thus underscoring the connection between sexuality and violence. Because they recognize that connection, women would oppose this and all wars, she said. The week we read that, there was a luncheon for Britain's Margaret Thatcher. We did not ask Mrs. Thatcher what she thought of the Waltraut Schoppe theory.

■ In his newsletter, *Context*, Martin Marty, a Lutheran at the University of Chicago, quotes at length a letter from an unnamed party in Switzerland who goes on about the terrible right-wingers in European Catholicism, and how Opus Dei is taking over the church. As further evidence of dirty work afoot, Marty cites no one less than Gary MacEoin, liberation enthusiast and champion of ultramundane theologies, who writes in the *National Catholic Reporter* about how a "gulf grows between rightist bishops and their flocks." Marty comments: "I bring this up because Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger, Opus Dei, and the like often get a good press from hardlining nostalgic Catholics who think their whip-cracking is faith-serving. I wonder. I wonder whether the final effect of the cracking and crackdown efforts will not be a loss of morale, if not of faith, among thousands." It is a comfort to know that Dr. Marty "and the like" worry so about the wellbeing of the Catholic Church.

■ Those who read James Burtchaell's sobering articles on the decline of Christian higher education may be interested in an item from Georgetown University, a putatively Catholic institution in Washington, D.C. "GU Choice" has been approved by the Student Affairs Commission and by the administration as an official organization. The group is entitled to office space, mailing privileges, and access to university financing. Some while back, Georgetown also accepted a homosexual activist organization. The university required that GU Choice refrain from providing abortions or publishing brochures recommending abortion clinics. The "co-chairwoman" of the organization said that such restrictions are "touchy," but GU Choice went along with them in order to get official recognition. About having an officially recognized pro-abortion group on campus, John J. DeGioa, Dean of Student Affairs, said this: "It is my intention with this decision to balance Georgetown's commitment to the free exchange of ideas with a 200-year commitment to the moral tradition of the Roman Catholic Church." Two observations: Whatever he intended to say, the dean is saying that the moral tradition of the Catholic Church does not include, and indeed must be balanced against, the free exchange of ideas. Paul Blanshard could not have said it better. Second, apparently voices promoting ideas antithetical to Catholic teaching are in such short supply in our culture that they must be supported by Catholic universities. Students of Georgetown, we are to believe, would not be able to engage pro-abortion arguments unless they are university sponsored. These developments, it is to be feared, have less to do with the free exchange of ideas than with the exchange of the university's soul for a measure of cultural respectability.

■ A number of books have recently appeared on the problems that celibacy poses to Roman Catholic priests. W. W. Meissner, a Jesuit and a psychiatrist at Boston College, suggests that much talk about celibacy fails to take seriously the cultural context that has had such a negative impact on vocations to the priesthood. "The concepts of a life of service in the church, of dedication to the work of saving souls,

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of service to others, of commitment and loyalty to a noble cause even at personal sacrifice seem to have evaporated from the contemporary horizon." Meissner is intelligently skeptical about those who so blithely assume that the answer is a married priesthood. "The problem, I would submit, does not inhere exclusively within the church and its clergy. Fully half of all contemporary marriages end in divorce. The issues here seem to me to extend beyond the level of merely sexual conflicts. Workers in the mental health field know well the variety of problems that arise from conflicted sexuality; they are legion. None of us—neither married nor unmarried, neither priest nor layman, neither male nor female—is exempt. A married clergy would not solve the problem. If the church ever does change its discipline regarding celibacy, it will do so with full awareness of what problems it may or may not be solving."

■ Galluping along, once again, we came across this: "Despite the aggressive espousal of atheism under Communist rule, there is actually a lower percentage of 'convinced atheists' in Lithuania than in many Western European countries. Just 2 percent of ethnic Lithuanians and 4 percent of other Lithuanians say they are convinced atheists. The average for Western Europe is 5 percent, ranging from 1 percent in Ireland, 3 percent in West Germany and Scandinavia, 4 percent each in Great Britain, Italy, and Spain to a high of 10 percent in France. In the United States, 5 percent of Americans say they do not believe in God." George Gallup keeps us well supplied with numbers to ponder. For instance, 64 percent of respondents in Ireland say that they consider themselves to be religious, while 82 percent of the Irish attend church at least once per week. On the other hand, 83 percent of Italians describe themselves as religious while only 36 percent go to church each week. Perhaps it is easier to be religious in Italy. Put differently, it seems the Irish have a more demanding notion of religion. In this survey of more than a dozen national populations, the Americans are closer to the Italians, with 81 percent saying they are religious and 43 percent attending church at least weekly. People were also asked about the importance of God in their lives, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means one does not consider God at all important and 10 means God is of paramount importance. Here the United States comes out on top with 8.2, while the Irish register 8, the Italians 6.9, and it's down from there to the French at 4.7 and the Danes at the bottom with 4.4. Make of it what you will.

■ Among formidable intellectual traditions, Calvinism is seldom given the attention it deserves. But not because Reformed thinkers—most of whom are comfortable with being called Calvinists—do not make the effort. That thought is brought to mind by Grant Wacker's review of *Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: A Guide to the Sources*, a new book by Edith Blumhofer and Joel Carpenter (Garland). Wacker, who teaches religious studies at the University of North Carolina, asks himself whether the guide is not too much focused on the Reformed tradition, in both its mainstream and fundamentalist forms. After all, evangelicalism is a wildly variegated phenomenon. In response to his question, Wacker writes: "My unscientific answer is yes, this is principally a *Guide* to the Reformed evangelical mainstream, but no, 'The Others' are not thrown in as an afterthought. The latter appear in the *Guide* at least as frequently as they appear in American public life. For at least a century Reformed evangelicals have proven themselves by far the most culturally aggressive members of the evangelical family. While other evangelicals were nurturing piety or losing themselves in ecstasy or maintaining a quiet peace witness, Reformed evangelicals were elbowing their way into the secular arena, publishing with university presses, commanding the air waves, tirelessly proclaiming their reformist agendas. If the Reformed tradition claims the lion's share of the entries in this volume, it may be because the Reformed tradition has long claimed the lion's share of the entries in the corridors of influence and visibility. What this *Guide* makes clear, more by what it does not say, is that it is high time for other species of evangelicals to make their voices heard, strong and clear, in the chorus of American public life."

■ There is an inescapable poignancy in growing up and losing the security of childhood beliefs. George Black reviews in *The Nation* Jacobo Timmerman's devastating report on Cuba today (*Cuba: A Journey*). He reluctantly accepts Timmerman's dismal conclusions. "The new alternative paradigm for Latin America," writes Mr. Black, "is likely to come from quarters as unexpected today as Cuba was in 1958." He lists some liberationist candidates who might produce that paradigm, and then adds, "But it won't come from Castro's Cuba, which is the crippled offspring of the cold war. It is time we swallowed that unpalatable fact, both those of us who grew distant from Cuba's excesses and those of us who remained faithful *fidelistas* to the end." Nonetheless, the new alternative paradigm will come from somewhere. That is an unshaken article of faith. The political pilgrimage continues.

■ In the same hospital where Nancy Cruzan died last December 26 lies 20 year-old Christine Busalacchi, who has been sustained by a feeding tube for three years following an automobile crash. Three days after Ms. Cruzan's death, Ms. Busalacchi's father tried to get a court order to remove the tube and "let her die." The hospital administrator objected, noting that Ms. Busalacchi is "cognitive of her surroundings and does have significant mental functions." For instance, he said, she waved at nurses on duty. Her

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father protested, "I'm not going to let my kid stay like that. If she knows what's going on, it's pure torture. If she doesn't, it's not worth going on." Either way, it's not worth going on. She may want to be dead; in which case the father wants to help her die. She may want to live; in which case the father wants her dead. If he can't get the food and fluid removed in Missouri, he wants her moved to more liberal Minnesota where that can be done without having to show that the patient wanted to die. The hospital administrator says he doesn't want to stand in the way of her being moved. It's not a matter of principle with him. He just doesn't want Ms. Busalacchi killed in Missouri where the hospital could be held legally liable.

■ Father Francis Canavan observes, "Water naturally runs downhill. So do our human passions." He was provoked to think about this when watching a program in which a fellow declared that Christian opposition to the current sexual revolution resulted in the Church "losing its credibility." "If he had said," writes Canavan, "that the Church was losing popularity, I would have understood him, because chastity has never been popular. But why did he say that the Church was losing credibility, i.e., the ability to be believed?" What is being demanded of Christians, he writes, is that they go with the flow of human passions. "It is a morality that has flowed, like water, downhill to its lowest level. In the nineteenth century, even that great exponent of liberal freedom, John Stuart Mill, could still declare: 'It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.' Today the satisfied pig declares Socrates to be lacking in credibility."

■ A colleague driving on the New Jersey Turnpike was tailgated by a yellow Toyota Corolla for a mile or more before the Toyota zoomed by on his right. Catching up with the same car at the toll booth, our colleague had time to write down the bumper stickers on its backside: KEEP ABORTION LEGAL, SAVE THE CHIMPS, FUR IS DEAD, DEFENDER OF WILDLIFE, VEGETARIANS ARE SPROUTING UP ALL OVER, SAVE OUR HOME EARTH, and NATIONAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL. The dangerous driver was obviously a person deeply committed to politically correct opinions. Our colleague could not help wondering, however, why he cared not for the whales.

■ On March 7, President Bush met with a number of rabbis and evangelical leaders to thank them for their moral support during the Gulf crisis. At the end of the discussion, an evangelical preacher gave the President a large package of chocolate chip cookies and told him that more than ten thousand such packages were shipped to the troops in the Gulf. Hidden in each cookie, he explained, was a Scripture verse. This might be viewed as the gospel equivalent of the Stealth Bomber, a creative way of getting in under the religious radar screen of Arab allies. Fortunately, there are no reports of casualties from soldiers choking on Bible verses.

Sources: Michael Medved speech from *Imprimis*, February 1991, published by Hillsdale College. Rothstein on multiculturalism in *The New Republic*, February 4, 1991. Allan Sandage featured in the *New York Times*, March 12, 1991. On Cardinal Bernardin, *National Catholic Reporter*, March 1, 1991. Waltraut Schoppe address in *Lutheran World Information*, February 28, 1991. Martin Marty on the Catholic Church in *Context*, February 15, 1991. On "GU Choice," the *New York Times*, March 4, 1991. Meissner on celibacy in *America*, February 2, 1991. Statistics on atheism and belief, Princeton Religion Research Center, January 1991. Grant Wacker on the *Guide* in *Evangelical Studies Bulletin*, Fall 1990 (Vol. 7, No. 2). George Black review of Timmerman book in *The Nation*, February 11, 1991. On Christine Busalacchi, the *New York Times*, December 31, 1990. Father Canavan on human passions in *catholic eye*, January 10, 1991.

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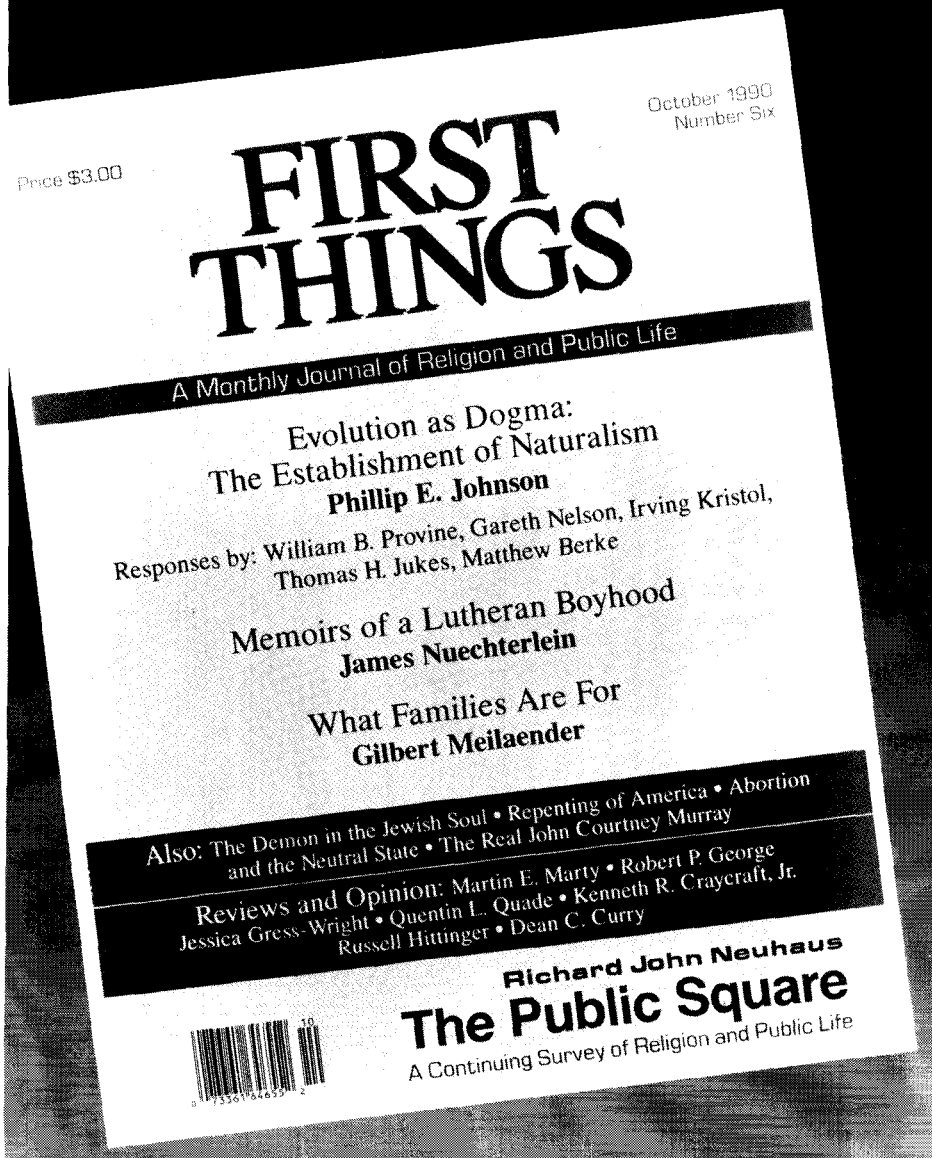
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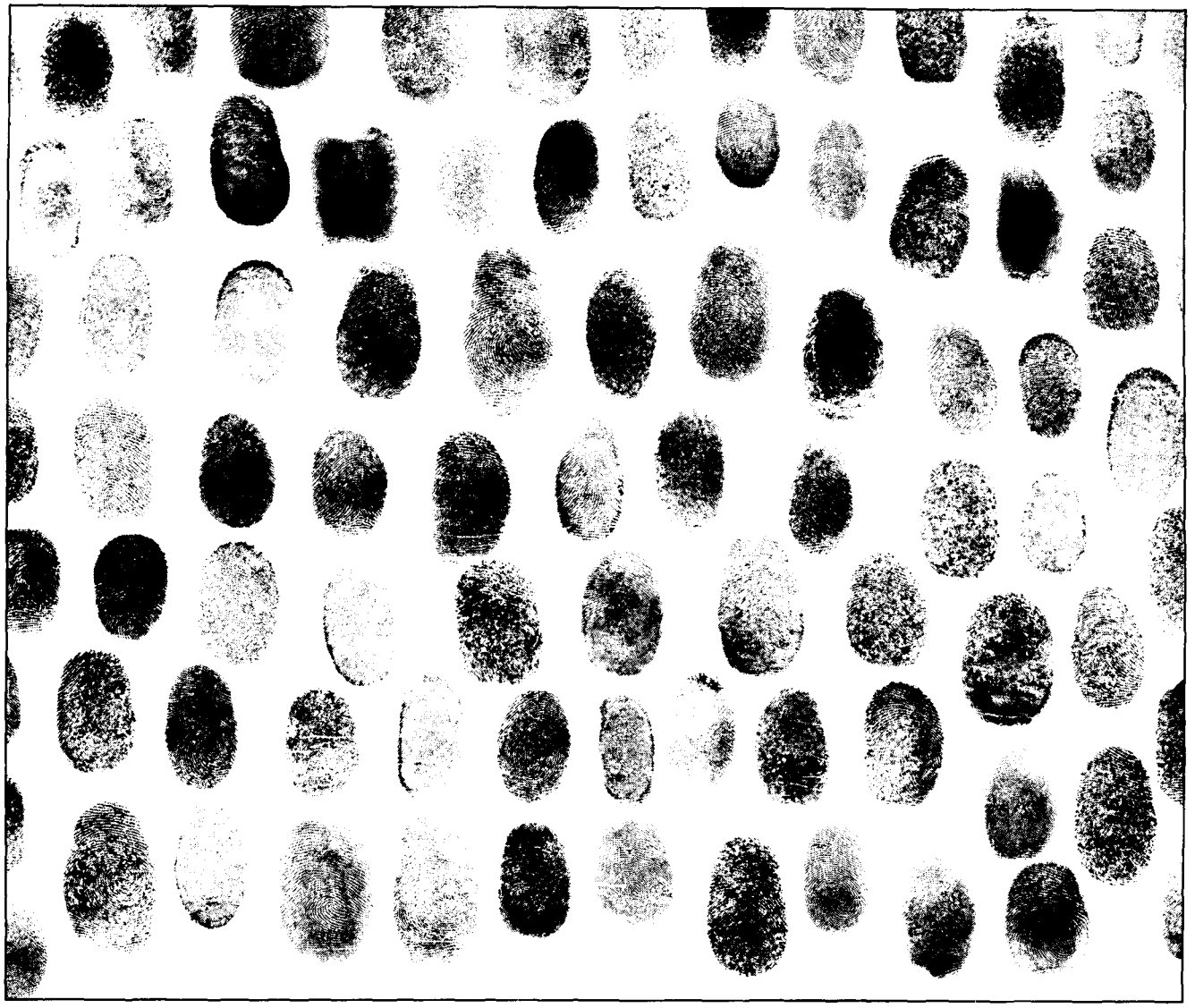
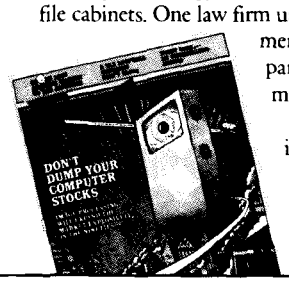


Without a computer, finding the two that match could be murder.

Just ask the detectives who spent three years looking for the killer of a New Jersey prosecutor. All they had to go on was a fingerprint left at the crime scene. But with a million prints in police files, how could they make a match?

Only with the help of a computer. One that did what computers of a few years ago couldn't do: Compare millions of images for similarity. The computer nailed the murderer.

Police work isn't the only line of work that can benefit from the harnessing of computers to images. As Forbes pointed out in its November 26th cover story, oceanographers used this computer imaging technology to turn a warehouseful of data into a couple of file cabinets. One law firm used it to scan 325,000 pages of documents—a search that would have kept 100 paralegals busy day and night for four months.



The applications for computer imaging systems are so dazzling that one day nearly every office worker could be connected to or near one. What all this means to a sluggish computer industry is growth. The kind of growth that will propel it into the year 2000, and beyond. The Forbes article contradicts Wall Street's conclusion that computers are just another cyclical capital goods industry.

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